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CHRIST AND CHRIST'S RELIGION

CHRIST

AND

CHRIST'S RELIGION

Sermons

BY

F. HOMES DUDDEN, D.D.

FELLOW OF LINCOLN COLLEGE, OXFORD
EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF LONDON

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PREFACE

THE sermons contained in this volume have been preached at intervals during the last few years, all with one exception in London. Since most of them deal more or less directly with various aspects of the Person and Work of our Lord, or with leading principles of His Teaching, I have entitled the collection *Christ and Christ's Religion.* As regards the form, I have thought it best to reproduce the discourses almost exactly as they were originally delivered. In publishing sermons, particularly those which were written some time ago, it is inevitable that a preacher should be tempted to supplement and enlarge, to modify statements which appear too crude or sweeping, to tone down the exhortations, and to elaborate, perhaps unduly, the literary style. The result of this tampering, however, is almost invariably a loss of force. I have accordingly resisted the temptation in the hope that, whatever may be the defects of my sermons in other respects, such direct-

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ness and force of appeal as they originally possessed, at least may be preserved.

Of the seventeen discourses here published, five (Nos. 1, 5, 11, 14, and 17) have already appeared in the columns of the *Guardian*, and three (Nos. 2, 4, and 16) in those of the *Church Times*.

F. HOMES DUDDEN.

LINCOLN COLLEGE, OXFORD,
October 1910.

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To Thee, O God,
My work I consecrate:
Thy Spirit be the censor of each word!
Lo, now I wait

And strive in soul,
Nor heed what pain is mine,
If so Thy clear truth, fairly set, herein
May brightly shine.

Though words grow old
And meanings fade, quick Truth,
In these but sojourning, from heart to heart,
Renews her youth,

And cries for aye,
"This task, true man, be thine—
Shape me new clothes, to woo and win the souls
That shall be mine!"

I know, good fruit
Comes of no evil tree:
My Lord, cast out the brutish mind, and plant
Great grace in me;

Else do I dread
The words thus written here,
Lest they condemn me. Yet before Thee, Lord,
Love casts out fear.

JOHN C. KENWORTHY.

I

THE GOOD PHYSICIAN

"Who went about doing good and healing."—Acts x. 38.

I

THE GOOD PHYSICIAN

THERE are many beautiful titles which at various times have been ascribed to Jesus Christ, but there is none, perhaps, more beautiful and more appropriate than that of "The Good Physician." This title is not, indeed, directly bestowed on our Lord by any New Testament writer; yet it is inevitably suggested, not only by several isolated passages—as, for example, the saying "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"—but also by the general tenour of the Gospel narrative. Our Lord is there consistently depicted as the Physician of mankind. His life was an epic of healing. Wherever He went He radiated health. The sick bodies were made sound, the feeble souls grew strong, the doors of God were opened to the spirits about to perish. Such was the historic manner of the epiphany of Christ, of His manifestation to His own contemporaries. "He went about," records the first Evangelist, "preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing." "Who went about doing good and healing," says St. Peter.

Now when the Gospel of the Good Physician went out into the Roman world, that world in a curious way had been made ready to receive it. For in the age of the Cæsars the people, it would seem, were much taken up with the question of healing. They had somehow become distractingly aware of sickness. They felt that they were ill; ill in body, ill in soul; mortally ill. And they longed to be made well. So they turned in their need to religion, and (as Harnack has pointed out) there took place about this time a great revival of the cult of Aesculapius, the pagan god of healing. Men made pilgrimages to his temples as they travel to sanatoria and watering-places to-day. They brought gifts to the god and dedicated their lives to him. In their physical and spiritual infirmities they prayed to him as one who was "most loving toward men," as "God the Saviour." Do you remember a passage in the Epistle to Titus which speaks of "the kindness of God our Saviour and His love toward men"? The phraseology is interesting, since the title "God the Saviour" was the familiar name for the healer Aesculapius, while the adjective of the noun translated "love toward men" was the peculiar, standing epithet of that heathen deity.

Into this sick Roman world, then, with its terrible sense of disorder and its feverish quest for health, Christianity made its way. It adapted itself deliberately to the necessities of the time. Deliberately it presented itself as the religion of recovery, as the means, the sole genuine means, of sanity and salvation. It offered

the sick world health. The Church was declared the hospital of invalid humanity; its doctrines and observances were the salutary remedies; its sacred books—how full they are of medicinal expressions!—held the prescriptions for all cures. And in the wards of the great infirmary, attending on the patients, the faith of the early Christians saw a Good Physician —no quack doctor like Aesculapius, but a true Physician—imparting new life, new joy, new hope, to body and mind alike new energy and power. "There is but one Physician," St. Ignatius cries, "Jesus Christ our Lord." "The Word of the Father," says Clement of Alexandria, "is the only Pæonian Physician for human infirmities and the Holy Charmer for the sick soul."

So much, my brethren, for the past. Let us look now to the present. Let us see, if we can, in what manner Jesus Christ is already, or may become, the Good Physician of the suffering men and women of our day.

Now, into the subject of physical healing I cannot here enter in detail. Yet a very few words in passing I desire to say. Our Lord, I ask you to notice, was in the habit of healing not only the souls, but also the bodies of men. The Apostles, again, in the Spirit of the Lord, healed not only the souls but also the bodies of men. And both our Lord and His Apostles very evidently anticipated that physical healing would be one of the results of the working of Christ's Spirit in the Christian Church. Nor even now, among the

children of that Church, has the belief in Christ's action on men's bodies quite died out; in our own communion, at least, on every occasion that the Eucharist is administered the formula is said, "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ that was given for thee, preserve thy body"—thy body—"and soul unto everlasting life." And after all, my brethren, is not this doctrine that the Good Physician cures even physical diseases intrinsically reasonable? You will all of you admit that the mind does enormously affect the body, that mental conditions profoundly influence physical health. Let the mind of a man be strengthened, let the forces of his inner life be stirred, let his spirit be quickened and vitalised, let the invisible principle of his being be renewed, and a modification of his bodily state is bound to follow. But if this be so, I ask—What power can give such vigour to the inward central life as the power of our religion? What energy can so revive the spirit of a man, can so refresh, reform, and stimulate it, as the grace of the life-giving Christ? It is right without doubt to pay homage to the science and skill of our doctors; but it is simple folly not to reckon with the truth that there is in recovery a spiritual as well as a material factor, and that no one so effectively as Jesus Christ can set in motion this curative force. Yes, even to-day Christ does in a real sense heal the bodies of men; nor, I think, do we receive the full Gospel of the Good Physician so long as that comforting fact be not acknowledged. As Mr. Dearmer in a recent book

observes:—"A religion that ignores the physical effects of the Spirit—health, that is to say—and the spiritual element in healing, is not commensurate with the Christianity of Christ."

But the healing of the body, after all, is secondary. Our chief and most pressing interest is the restoration of the soul. This is our foremost business. This is our great concern. Here is the sphere in which the whole process of healing must of necessity begin. Now it seems to me that the men of the twentieth century, no less than the men of the Roman imperial era, are keenly alive to the fact that their soul is in need of healing. "Humanity up to this day," writes Maeterlinck, "has been like an invalid tossing and turning on his couch in search of repose." We are conscious in our nature of a radical disorder. Our music is out of tune. Our flowers have lost colour and fragrance. Our sunshine is flecked with shadow. Maxim Gorky, speaking of the histories of his Russian outcasts, writes:—"Each story was unfolded before us like a piece of lace in which black threads predominated." And the description might, perhaps, not unfairly be applied to all the story of the modern spirit. The black predominates. Through the sweetest melody of modern poetry, through the grandest achievements of modern art, through the deepest utterances of modern science and philosophy, through the manifold different expressions of the spirit of the age, there run those threads—those gloomy strands of ruin and of wrong. Can we really deny, then, that the soul of us

is sick? Surely the old lament of such a one as St. Bruno has not lost its force. "It is not merely the weaker part of my nature which fails me," he cries. "It is the very strongest. My understanding, will, and firmness, my spiritual might, all that is or may be virtue, is by my sin enfeebled."

But for us, my brethren, as for the men of old, the Good Physician waits. For us, as for them, is the healing power of God put forth in Jesus Christ. Let us never forget that God wills us to be well. His purpose for us is perfection and life; His work is salvation. "This," says Clement of Alexandria, "is the greatest and most royal work of God, the saving of mankind." We may not for an instant doubt God's will. Why, do we not recognise even in ourselves a wonderful instinct of helpfulness, an irrepressible impulse to comfort the suffering, to rescue the perishing, to reclaim the lapsed? And can we dare to think that the creature is in this respect superior to the Creator, that this human love of ours is kindlier and wider than the love of God? As David puts the argument in Browning's "Saul":—

> "Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
> And dare doubt He alone shall not help him, Who yet alone can?"

Nay, brethren, let us take our stand immovably on this. We do not require proof-texts; we do not require the subtle reasonings of philosophy; we do not require even the lessons of history. Alone this helpful instinct of the imperfect human heart is sufficient

to make us certain of the passion of helpful love that surges forth for ever from the infinite Heart of God.

But further, you should notice that this omnipotent Will to heal is not a mere vague, diffused, unordered force, elusive and intangible. It takes effect through a Person. It makes itself felt in Christ. Here is the living channel of the Father's saving life. Through Christ pours in that endless stream of health, that flood of immortality, that abolishes the sicknesses and weaknesses of the soul, and works again and again the amazing miracle of repair. It is always through Jesus Christ. The Son of God is the Love of God come near us for quickening action, and in Him—and in Him alone—we know the benefits of that Power, "who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

Behold, then, Jesus Christ, the Good Physician! Once let your soul come in contact with that Soul, once let your spirit have communion with that Spirit, and all the forces of healing will immediately be in motion. And in this there is nothing abnormal, nothing unnatural. We all of us know—do we not?—how salutary is the influence which even a noble man may exercise on others. Says Carlyle, for example, of Goethe, "The sight of such a man was to me a Gospel of Gospels, and did verily, I believe, save me from destruction outward and inward." "I was a thoroughly idle boy"—so Bishop Hamilton of

Salisbury speaks of his Eton days—"but I was saved from worse things by getting to know Gladstone." A bookseller of Brighton once showed Stopford Brooke a portrait of the great preacher, Frederick W. Robertson, and explained to the biographer, "Whenever I am tempted to do anything mean I look at that picture, and the face recalls me to my better self." It is as such a saving influence, though in a supereminent degree, that we experience Jesus Christ. He has supremely the art of building up the character. He gives health to the soul. He gives vigour. He gives tone. He breathes into it the potency of "the Lord and Giver of life." By His Presence within us He makes us so well and sound that, even in the midst of the most distressing outward circumstances, amid sorrow and suffering, amid poverty and pain, our spirit endures unbroken, strong and victorious in the strength of the Son of God. Thus through the stillness came the beautiful Voice to à Kempis, "I am thy Salvation, I am thy Life; keep thyself with Me, and thou shalt find peace."

To each of us, then, my brethren, Christ offers such spiritual health. But lastly, let me remind you that to this, as to all His blessings, a condition is attached. "God," declares St. Augustine, "who made thee without thy help, will not save thee without thy help." Wholeness and happiness, sanity and salvation—they are indeed the Good Physician's gifts, but they are granted to those alone who will appropriate them from within. And so we learn once more the time-honoured

lesson of surrender—the duty of submitting to the heavenly Doctor's treatment, of accepting His remedies, of following His regimen, of obeying His discipline. "How few understand," cries one of the greatest teachers of the surrendered life—"how few understand what God would do for them and effect by them, if they would only yield themselves entirely into His hands, and allow His grace to act!"

Yet there is something more even than this. For it is not merely passive surrender in a patient but active co-operation that is needed for a cure. We should seek, I say, for health. We should seek for health deliberately. We should seek it with science and method. We should seek it at all times and in all directions. In the church and in the chamber, in the Eucharistic offering, in the study of the Scriptures, in "the expectant silences of prayer," in the companionship of noble books and saintly men, we should watch for the passing of the Good Physician, that we may reach out and touch the hem of His garment and be healed. And not least would I recommend the systematic exercise of mental concentration. Set aside each day some little portion of your time and try to realise with all the faculties of your being the Power and Presence of the healing Christ. Let your mind be steadily fixed on the idea that Jesus Himself is there to make your spirit well; let your heart expect with confidence, let your will with joy consent, that His salvation shall be manifested. Bar out for a while all thoughts of worldly things, and vitally concentrate

your whole attention on the Saviour. You will find, I think, that the practice is very fruitful of results. You may start with small beginnings—ten minutes of recollection in the morning and as many in the evening, is the advice of the French archbishop. But to those who persevere a time will come, when at any and every moment—amid the chatter of the drawing-room and the noises of the street, in shops and trains and offices and places of amusement—they are able to retire into an inner sanctuary of silence, and refresh their wearied soul at the Fountain of Life Eternal.

"Who went about doing good and healing." Our thoughts just now, my brethren, are much occupied with healing. Our talk is all of cure—cure by Christian Science, cure by Mental Science, cure by Faith, by Spiritism, by Hypnotism. Almost daily we hear of new methods and new remedies, and some of us, perhaps, with an unwholesome craze for novelty, are inclined to assay them all. Well, we learn by experience. But when the strange systems have proved inadequate to our case, when without lasting result we have made the whole round of experiment, when we have suffered many things like the woman in the Gospel, and with growing disgust and despair perceive ourselves getting worse, then let us return once more to the Divine Physician and become again poor patients in the infirmary of Jesus. For here, as nowhere else, is the reality of cure. Christ can, if He see fit, restore even the ailing body; He will—He

infallibly will—restore the spirit and the soul. Try Him, and you will see.

"The world is weary of new tracts of thought
That lead to naught—
Sick of quack remedies prescribed in vain
For mortal pain;
Yet still above them all one Figure stands
With outstretched Hands."

II

THE ONE FOUNDATION

"Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."—1 Cor. iii. 11.

II

THE ONE FOUNDATION

CORINTH, in St. Paul's time, was a cosmopolitan city. The most important station on the great trade-route between Rome and the East, it was naturally the meeting-place of men of every race and class and character. Its streets were crowded, somewhat as the streets of London are to-day, with throngs of strangers, representing widely different types and engaged in the pursuit of widely different interests. Here Romans mingled with Greeks, and Jews of Alexandria and Syria with pagans of Asia Minor and the distant East. Here the mantled philosopher elbowed the man of pleasure, and the pompous official struggled on his way through surging, chattering crowds of traders and slaves and foreign sailormen. A city of infinite variety, a ferment of multitudinous unassimilated forces and activities—such was Corinth. Yet it was to this city, with all its many teeming, diverse forms of life, that the Apostle penned that memorable sentence which tells of a unity underlying every difference—"Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Christ the One Foundation. That has been the

teaching of the Church from the earliest days till now. In every age and in every land the Church has taught invariably that the one determining factor of the Christian religion is the Person of Jesus. That is the absolute, essential thing. The Christian religion is not a mere system of doctrine. It is not a mere ethical code. It is not merely a redemptive social force. It is above all dependence on a Person. And herein lies its peculiarity and its novelty. A Church Father of the second century, being pressed with the question, "What new thing did the Lord bring us by His coming?" replied, "Know that He brought all newness in bringing us Himself." The distinctive feature of the new religion is the Person of Jesus.

But in recent years, my brethren, this Catholic belief has been on many sides assailed. Competent scholars tell us that the root of Christianity is not a Person but a doctrine, that the Person is only the prophet, the preacher, the publisher of that doctrine. We look in vain in these new theories for the Jesus that we knew. We find, indeed, a man of singular perfection, a man of unique spiritual insight. We find a religious genius whom we cannot but revere. We find an heroic soul filled to the full with the Spirit of God, and responding to the promptings of that Spirit in the most perfect way imaginable. But the Lord, the Christ of the Church, we do not find. The distinctive feature of our religion, according to this modern school, is no longer Jesus, but the teaching

of Jesus—the wonderful new teaching about life, and about character, and about duty, and about God.

Here, then, are two views, between which nowadays men make their choice. The one finds the basis of religion in a Person, the other in a teaching. The one maintains that Jesus is Himself the very essence of His gospel, the other declares Him merely the proclaimer of His gospel. The one traces back our religion to God Himself made man, the other derives it from a man whom God inspired. Here, I say, in rough and rude, yet very striking contrast, these two views lie before us. And the critical question, which thousands of thoughtful men and women are to-day debating is, which of the two shall command their concurrence and assent?

Now I wish this morning to endeavour to answer, and to help you to answer, this all-important question in the light of certain facts. For we cannot too often remember that we have facts to deal with. There are facts of primitive belief: there are facts of original claim: there are facts of Christian history. Which of these views, then, best squares with all the facts? Which school can best account for them, best justify them, and render them most intelligible?

In the first place, let us consider some facts of primitive belief. Let us inquire what the first generation of Christians thought about Jesus. And for this purpose, let us take as representative the earliest

Christian witness, the first who left on record his opinion, the Apostle Paul. Now you have to remember that this same Paul was himself a part-contemporary of Jesus. He was converted shortly after the death of Jesus, he wrote his first extant letter within twenty-five years of His death, he wrote the whole of his letters within thirty-eight years of His death. No mythical halo, you observe, no glamour of antiquity could in this short time have obscured the historic outline of the Man of Nazareth, to dazzle Paul's eyes or mystify his intellect. No. Jesus was of Paul's time; He had walked and talked in Paul's Jerusalem, and had there been crucified within Paul's memory, only a year or two ago. What, then, has Paul, with these historical occurrences still vivid in his mind, to tell us about Jesus?

Now, if you open his very first letter—the first to the Thessalonians—and turn to the very first chapter and the very first verse, you will find an astonishing sentence:—"Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." How remarkable this is! We modern men are so accustomed to the formula and the doctrine it implies, that we fail, perhaps, to realise the wonder of it and the novelty. But with what a thrill of horror would an orthodox Hebrew of the Apostle's age have read those words! Remember that the reference is to One who in living memory died, so to speak, on the scaffold; remember the common belief that "cursed," not by man only, but by God, "is every one that hangeth on a tree";

remember, moreover, that the title Lord, here most emphatically ascribed to Jesus, is the very word which is used by the Greek translators of the Old Testament to render the Hebrew Jehovah; and then conceive the feelings of the Jewish monotheist when he heard of this crucified Sufferer being crowned with the Divine name, and positively linked, as the Giver of grace and peace, with the One and Only God, the God of Israel, the Almighty! I call your attention particularly to the point. Paul solemnly couples together Jesus Christ and God. From the very first, it is clear, he found in Jesus Someone higher than a man; from the very first he saw "shining on the brow of the Victim of Calvary the Divine glory of the Son of God."

Yes, brethren; to the earliest of our Christian witnesses Jesus was, in the fullest sense of the term, the Son of God. He was not merely a son of God, as any pious Jew might claim the title; not merely a son of God, as the pagan Roman might describe a hero of his race; not even the Son of God in the sense of the promised Messiah; but God's "own Son," in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead," essentially Divine. To Him Paul prays; for Him Paul gives his life; in Him hereafter Paul expects to see his Judge; to Him Paul finally assigns the incommunicable name, —He is "over all, God blessed for ever." Could any creed, I ask, be more explicit? Could any loftier claims be made for Jesus than these which were actually made within but forty years of His death? Here surely is a notable fact with which we are com-

pelled to reckon. For the first generation of believers, as for the later Church, the system of Christianity is grounded upon a Person, a Being at once human and superhuman, truly man yet no less truly more-than-man, the "God-man," Jesus Christ.

We have heard what our earliest witness has to tell us about Jesus. And now, in the second place, let us notice what Jesus has to say about Himself. Let us study some facts of original claim. We may leave for this time the teaching of the fourth Gospel, the clearness of which is clouded in the eyes of some by critical disputes, and turn by preference to the primitive and less theological records of the first three. Let us listen to Jesus as He talks with His disciples, on a mountain slope, perhaps, or by the waters of the Sea of Galilee, or in the streets and homes of Bethany and Capernaum. What does He say of Himself? What is the impression of Himself that He conveys?

Now if you and I had had the privilege of sitting at the feet of Jesus, we should at once have been struck, I think, by one thing—by a strange, characteristic undertone of greatness, which runs throughout His discourse. It is only an undertone, it is true, more overheard than heard. For Jesus does not dilate upon His glories. He does not compel belief by unquestionable texts and proofs. And yet, by many a casual, indirect allusion, He undoubtedly betrays the self-consciousness of a Being immeasurably exalted above the level of mankind. He speaks as Someone from

another sphere, whose home is far away. And we feel instinctively that here is a great mystery—a mystery which puzzles and perplexes and baffles, a mystery which the rough-and-ready methods of mere human logic are inadequate to sound.

Listen, then, attentively, and mark what unprecedented claims He makes. He says He is greater than Jonas, greater than Solomon, greater even than the sacred Temple. The prophets, kings, and saints of olden time—He stands above them all. Over the very angels He exalts Himself; they are His ministers, subject to His bidding. Towards His disciples His imperiousness is unbounded. He demands, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, that they should live for Him alone, that they should give up all in life they love for Him — father and mother, children, and home, and wife. With God, again, He claims a unique relation. He says, without any attempt at justification: "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father; and no man knoweth . . . the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." The sublimity of the sage, the speculation of the sophist, the awful wisdom of the anointed priest—all this He sweeps aside, proclaiming that He alone of men can fathom the abysses of the Infinite. So too this youthful Galilean carpenter ascribes to Himself an ecumenical importance. He looks on the seething turmoil of nations, races, peoples, and He calls them to His heart, crying, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." The whole great world

may come like a little child and nestle at His bosom. He looks again into the distant future and sees the nations gathered at His judgment-seat. The dead come up and the living come up, while He sits majestic on the throne of the Almighty and utters the final, dreadful word of life and death.

How startling, how utterly astonishing is this self-consciousness of Jesus! Surely no thoughts or visions such as these ever found entrance into merely human mind. Surely the very madness of self-consequent enthusiasm could never have carried a man to such outrageous lengths. The very idea of being the one and only Mediator of God! No moral teacher or enraptured prophet ever conceived himself in a character so sublime. Yet this was the character that Jesus, as a matter of historical fact, not only conceived, but consistently sustained. My brethren, when we listen to Jesus, so imperious, yet so tender, bidding men love Him, live for Him, die for Him; calling Himself Master, calling Himself Lord, calling Himself Shepherd, calling Himself Judge; claiming to interpret God to men, claiming to be the only source of joy and rest for human souls, we are amazed at the consciousness of greatness which His words express. And when we go on to compare His utterance with His character, when we think of His nobility, His sanity, His unexplainable originality, His unconsciousness of sin, so astounding in a man who was really good, why we feel—do we not?—that here is One who is quite outside the measure of our little earthly standards.

It is no mere man, though unmistakably man, that comes to meet us here. We are constrained to bow in worship. We are compelled to confess that the Person thus presented to us can be none other than the Son of God.

But thirdly and lastly, the question of the Person of Jesus cannot be settled merely by appeal to ancient books. One great fact still remains to be accounted for, and that is His stupendous influence on the history of mankind. Christ has led captive all the peoples of the civilised world, who find in Him the abiding inspiration of their progress and development. On every sphere of our life has He left His mark. To the politician He has given a law, to the thinker a philosophy, to the poet a song, to the saint a passion. Transcendent works of human genius have been brought forth at His call. The chiselled stone swells into graceful arch, and rises airily into dome and spire, to do Him honour. Music for Him breathes out her sweetest chant: no other name is hymned in strain so touching. For Him the scholar chronicles his finest thought; to Him the hero dedicates his proudest deed; to Him the statesman offers as a votive gift his knowledge, eloquence, and practised skill.

What multitudes, too, of obscure and unrecorded lives have been held, possessed, and governed by the influence of Jesus! He has set up a throne in the universal human heart, and millions of every age and race and class and character have yielded to His sway.

Tired men, wearied with the frets of life, have found in Jesus rest and full refreshment. Bad men, smirched and polluted with the soil of sin, have come to Jesus and have been made clean, and, through His fiery baptism, have passed into the righteousness of the Father's Kingdom. Timid men, trembling on the edge of life, and shivering at the dark unknown that lies before them, have looked to Jesus and dismissed their fears, content to trust themselves to the care of the Good Shepherd. Quite undeniable is the fact of such experience, say of it what you will. Unnumbered are the witnesses. Men and women, young and old, Occidental and Oriental, rich and poor, wise and foolish, all alike bear testimony that they have proved Christ adequate to all their needs, that they have gained from Him the enduring satisfaction of their souls' desires and cravings.

Now surely all this requires some explanation. All the world over it is true that out of nothing nothing comes. For great results there must be cause proportionate. Then let us ask once more, what cause, what force, what manner of intelligence can have been adequate to produce effects so wonderful? Great men, it is true, have often for a season won ascendancy over their fellows. Socrates and Mohammed, Luther and Napoleon, many another son of earth, has touched and deeply stirred the souls of men and set hearts beating at a fiery speed. But where is the man who could grip the whole civilised world, and that for centuries? Where is the man whose power is not spent, whose

influence is not broken, whose personal fascination is not weakened, as age after age disappears into the past? Where is the man who could so enthral humanity as to force it to preach him, trust him, love him, worship him in all times, in all circumstances, in all places whithersoever the knowledge of his name might come? Could any mere man really have done all this? My brethren, the experience of the race says No. And the philosophy of human history says No. History bears witness only to a Christ who is Divine.

We have seen, this morning, that two rival views are claiming the allegiance of the present generation. The one finds the basis of Christianity in the teaching of a man, inspired as Moses was inspired and more inspired, divine as Shakespeare was divine and more divine, but now dead, in the sense in which Moses is dead and Shakespeare is dead. The other finds the basis of Christianity in the ever-living Person of God for men made Man. Such are the views which, in some form or other, confront each one of us, and between which, sooner or later, we must make our solemn choice. Fresh as it ever was, the eternal question comes to us, "What think ye of Christ?", "Whom say ye that I am?" And if anyone here be still in doubt about the answer to that question, I urge him to reconsider the matter along the same three lines which I have indicated to-day. Let him go back to the earliest days of our religion, and see Jesus already elevated to the loftiest position in the Universe, and

presented to mankind as One who had a native right to all the worship they could offer. Let him gaze on that wonderful Figure in the Gospels, that Being so extraordinary, so wrapped in mystery, so unaccountable on any rationalistic hypothesis. Let him unroll the long chronicle of history and mark how, through all the centuries, Christ has been ever the Light of the World, the Helper, the Healer, the Friend, the Inspirer, the Saviour of men. And then, reflecting on these facts and weighing them fairly, let him ask himself whether any ingenious modern explanation will account for them all so well and so fully as the ancient belief of the Catholic Church, that "God was in Christ," that Christ is God.

In a well-known book occurs this passage: "Christianity is faith in a certain person Jesus Christ, and by faith in Him is meant such unreserved self-committal as is only possible because faith in Jesus is understood to be faith in God, and union with Jesus union with God." Such without doubt was the Christianity of the past. And may we not believe that, in spite of the perplexities and questionings of modern times, such will be also the Christianity of the future? "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

III

JESUS CHRIST THE SAME

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."—HEB. xiii. 8.

III

JESUS CHRIST THE SAME

THE same. Is He really the same? When we look upon Christ in Himself, as the Person, the living Reality that has been operating through the ages, nothing indeed appears more permanent and certain. But again when we look upon Christ as reflected in the thoughts of men—when we consider men's notions about Him, their feelings about Him, their ideas about His Person—the sameness breaks up into something infinitely variable. The Christ who here confronts us is a changing Christ. He is never quite alike for any two intelligences. He varies from man to man, and from age to age. What a difference there is, for example, between the Christ of John Chrysostom and the Christ of John Calvin! What a difference between the Christ of mediæval Scholasticism and the Christ of twentieth-century Modernism! What a difference between the Christ of the Russian peasant, and of the German theologian, and of the average business man of London or New York! The note that most forcibly strikes us, at any rate at first, is this note of difference. The outline of that gracious Figure seems continually to waver. It is never the same—

no, never quite the same. We see in Jesus something other than our fathers saw; and those who come after us will probably find much in Him that we, sharp-sighted though we think ourselves, have not discovered.

And yet, my brethren, as I hope to show, behind all superficial differences and divergences, the Lord who claims us is indeed the same. The clouds take many shapes about the summit of the mountain, are here to-day and gone to-morrow, but the mountain forever stands. And so, behind the glimmering mists of human fancy, behind our uncertain wisdom and our fluctuating formulas, behind our notions of Christ and our notions of other people's notions of Christ, the great Reality eternally abides. The living Person does not change. That Jesus whose life has been the inspiration, whose truth the illumination, whose death the salvation of uncounted millions; that Jesus whose marvellous attractiveness has cast its sweet spell alike upon an ancient and a modern world; that Jesus whom Peter preached and Francis followed, whom mystics saw in visions and whom saints have loved—He alters not. He is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the Ending, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

Let me draw your attention to three very simple points in respect of which Jesus Christ must always remain the same amid all the advances and growths of science and civilisation.

I

And the first of the points is this. For all Christians and in all ages our Lord Jesus Christ is the same, as the supreme Revelation of the invisible God. In a perfectly unique and final way He manifested the Infinite. As a recent author puts it: "The most wonderful disclosure of the being and character and work of God was not inscribed on tables of stone, or published in starry letters in the sky, nor uttered by a voice out of the depth of the heavens, but written out in the lineaments of the beloved Son."

And you ought to mark exactly how this revelation was made. It was not merely, you should notice, that our Lord talked about God. "Words," cries a brilliant American—"they are the least of what a man says." And that is eminently true of Jesus Christ. He did not attempt, like a professor of theology, to reason about God, or to describe Him, or to define Him. He did not discuss God after the manner of a Socrates. He did much more than that. He came, not to say, but to show. He came, not to expound, but to exhibit. He came to give us, not a philosophy of the Absolute, but a vision of the Absolute. He came to be Himself the great object-lesson of God. Amid the mysteries and problems of time, amid the secrets and sorrows of life, amid the difficulties and doubts of experience and knowledge, Jesus came, to be Himself the personal proof, the living demonstration,

the flesh and blood image, of the Divine Life and Love.

"Do you know the Father?" was the pathetic question which Erskine, we are told, once asked of a Scotch shepherd. And it brings to our remembrance a certain scene of long ago—a solemn meal in the twilight and Someone there who said: "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." What a prodigious claim it was! "Who knows me, knows God. Who hears me, hears God. Who understands my thoughts, understands God's thoughts. I am the vision, I am the voice, I am the manifest mind of the Eternal." Was there ever anything like it? And yet, my brethren, astounding though it was, has not that claim been justified? Is it not true, most literally true, that all the best and deepest things we learn of God, we learn through the medium of the life of Jesus Christ? Is it not simply a matter of fact that Christendom—even the critical Christendom of the present day—is utterly at a loss to grasp the character of God, except it be translated into terms of Jesus Christ? Our God—what is He? Is He really known at all, but as the Spirit which lives and moves and operates in Christ? I do not, of course, for a moment deny that, apart from our Lord's revelation, men may have ideas of God. Ideas are about in the air, and theories are always plentiful. We may think of God with the Schoolmen as the First Cause and First Mover; or we may think of Him with the philosophers as the Universal Soul; or we may think of Him with men of science as the

vast, mysterious Something, at the back of all phenomena. We may think of Him æsthetically as the eternal Beauty, or ethically as the all-righteous Will. Certainly we may have, if we please, ideas of God. But the knowledge of God—that is quite another thing. Ideas do not give knowledge. Whatever may be their value as a discipline of the intellect, they do not provide a revelation of God in which the heart can rest. We cannot be content with a mere abstract Deity. What we crave is a Person, a Presence, the touch of a guiding Hand and the smile of a heavenly Face; and we find these nowhere but in Jesus Christ. Yes, when we want the real God, when we want the concrete God, when we want the living, loving, helping God, when we want—to sum all in a word—the Father God, why, then we have no alternative but to go to Jesus. Says Luther very truly: "We should never recognise the Father's grace and mercy, were it not for our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the mirror of the Father's heart."

Here, then, is one relation in which for all men and ages Christ remains the same. He is the perennial satisfaction of man's deepest need, of the demand for an adequate revelation of the Divine. "If we will but listen attentively," writes Max Müller, "we can hear in all religions a groaning of the spirit, a struggle to utter the unutterable, a longing after the infinite, a love of God." That longing after God, which runs through all the centuries, is satisfied once for all in Jesus Christ. He reveals to us the Invisible.

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What Jesus was to St. Peter and the Twelve, to the woman who was a sinner, to the penitent publican and the penitent thief, to the suffering folk and children; what He was in His sympathy and forgiveness and self-sacrifice; what He was throughout His life and in His death; even that is the unseen God to every trusting heart. To know Christ is to know the Father. "By Him," writes one of the earliest Christian authors, "by Him we look up into the heights of heaven. By Him we behold, as in a glass, God's immaculate and most excellent image. By Him are the eyes of our heart opened. By Him our foolish and darkened understanding blossoms up anew towards the light."

II

Let us pass on to another point. For all Christians and in every period Jesus Christ is the same, not only as the supreme Revelation of God, but also as the supreme Revelation of man. He stands as the final definition of humanity. He shows us what man was designed for, what he was meant to be, and what, in the fulness of time and by God's grace, he yet shall be.

It was Goethe who said: "I bow before Jesus Christ as the revelation of supreme morality." And another German thinker, far more profound than Goethe ever was, has characterised our Lord as the "ideal of a humanity well-pleasing in the sight of God." Familiarity and use have blunted, to some extent, the edge

of all such phrases; but the fact of which they testify, when we ponder it, is tremendous. There was once a perfect man. Once in a far-off corner of the Roman Empire, amid the narrowest and most provincial of all ancient peoples, in the person of a carpenter who was crucified as a criminal, the type of the race was positively realised. All that prophets had predicted, all that poets had dreamed—all the beauty and the melody and the nobility of manhood—became an actuality in one lovely soul. And what does that imply? It means that here is given to all the men of all the ages the Divine standard of humanity. Here is God's man, God's notion of man, God's description of man. This life is God's idea of a genuine human life. This character is God's notion of a genuine human character. Here is true man, the absolute man; and henceforth every man, of every time and clime and temperament, must bow before the vision of that Perfect One, and say, "This is indeed the truth of my humanity; this is God's ideal for all men and for me."

And do you see, my brethren, how here once more our Lord rescues us from abstractions? Centuries ago Plato expressed the wish that the ideal of human excellence might become incarnate. Well, it is just that which has happened. The ideal has been brought down from the cold realm of speculation, and visualised once for all in the form of Jesus Christ. The ideal is no longer a theory: it is the living Christ. The truth of human life and human character and human

destiny is simply Christ. The law of our real selves, the perfection of our being—it is nothing else than Christ. And this solves many problems. Do we ask, What is the goal of life? What ought we to be? The answer is that we are to be like Jesus Christ. Do we ask, What is the rule of conduct? What ought we to do? The answer is that we are to act like Jesus Christ. Do we ask again, How or what are we to think? Again from the past there comes the answering voice, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Thus Christ is goodness and manhood, and goodness and manhood are Christ. And we only become our proper selves, true men, when our character approximates to the character of Christ. There is an often-quoted saying of John Stuart Mill which some of you may remember. "Not even now," he declares, "could it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life."

This, then, is a second relation in which for all men and ages Christ remains the same. He is the supreme revelation of man—of the truth, of the meaning, of the capacities of our nature. He is the unspoiled, genuine, God-intended man, the standard man. And should not this bright revelation of the ideal humanity warn us to beware of undervaluing our humanity and holding ourselves too cheap? It is easy enough to be cynical. It is easy to think of ourselves despairingly

and disparagingly. It is easy to say, as the pessimistic Frenchman says, that "man is no more than a miserable puppet, condemned to play I know not what lugubrious comedy, before I know not what icy spectators"; or to write, as Disraeli writes, that "youth is a blunder, manhood a struggle, old age a regret"; or with Byron to complain that "experience comes to reproach us with the past, to disgust us with the present, to alarm us with the future." But, looking to Jesus, we learn higher lessons. If our achievements are yet but little, our possibilities are great. There is a destiny before us. There is a dignity of manhood which is not beyond our reach. There is an ideal, a human excellence and blessedness, to manifest which and to lead us to which the Redeemer came.

III

And that brings me to my last point. For to all Christians and in every period Jesus Christ is the same, not only as the supreme Revelation of the true God and the true man, but as the supreme moving Power for bringing us to the true God and making us the true men. He is the Saviour and the Life-giver, the Being in whom, as well as through whom, we have experience of God and are redeemed to life and happiness.

And can there really be a doubt, my brethren, that our Lord has in fact approved Himself supremely the power that saves? Salvation is simply life. "We

wish to live, to live happily, to live eternally," says a French theologian. "The whole notion of salvation is summed up in these words." But where are we to look for the life-creating power, for the energy that saves? Well, of course there are many forces in the world to-day, which claim to be that power. Christian Science makes its claim. Art and culture make their claim. The New Thought, as men call it, makes its claim. The religion of humanity, the religion of duty, the religion of work, the religion of health and soundness and athleticism—all make their claims. Yet one voice contradicts another voice, and one authority overrules another authority, and none of them really avails to satisfy the soul, or to raise it from the death of the Now to the life of the Forever. And then out of the past a historic Figure rises. A Person comes near and touches us. And from Him there proceeds in some way, we know not how, a power, a force, an energy which does tranquillise our heart, which does satisfy our need, which carries us up to the very summit of existence, and makes us glad in God and alive with immortality. We may not account for it properly, brethren. We may not account for it at all. But the solid fact remains. Among all the figures and the forces of the world, Jesus Christ alone is the power that really saves. He works the quickening miracle. We find the life, the happy life, the eternal life, in Him.

And so you observe in history that the crowning and most salutory experiences of men have somehow

been connected with the redeeming Christ. The Jewish bigot speeding on his destructive errand along the Damascus road is lifted clean away from all his narrowness and intolerance by One who says: "I am Jesus." The heathen philosopher, Justin, goes seeking in vain for truth among Stoics and Platonists and Pythagoreans; but "the gates of light" fly open to him in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Augustine in the garden, amid the most violent struggles of heart and mind, hears the child's voice chanting, "Take and read! take and read!" and he enters the new life when he opens at the words, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." "Thou didst call," writes the great bishop, "Thou didst cry aloud, and break through my deafness. Thou didst glimmer, Thou didst shine, and drive away my blindness. Thou didst breathe, and I drew breath, and breathed in Thee."

And the same is the experience of men to-day. The old cry for salvation, the "Who shall deliver me?" of the Apostle of the Gentiles, is not an anachronism. It goes up, not a whit less piercingly, from the heart of our modern society. Who shall deliver us? we cry. Who shall deliver us from the ruin and wreck of sin, from the débris of the past, from the convulsed and shameful present? Who shall deliver us from fear? Who shall deliver us from dependence on the world, from the bondage of the trivial, from the passion for pleasures that pall, from the disgust and intolerable boredom of a purely frivolous existence? Who shall deliver us from false

ideas and false ideals, from the culture that is no culture,

> "When the soul, growing clearer,
> Sees God no nearer:
> When the soul, mounting higher,
> To God comes no nigher."

Yes, who shall deliver us from the maladies of our century, and restore us to God, and to ourselves, and to the peace that comes from harmony with the Divine will? My brethren, from many lands, in many voices, in many languages, rings the answer: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

And thus, you see, amid all the changing views and varying theories about Christ, our Lord, the living Person, still remains the same. As the supreme Revelation of God, as the supreme Revelation of man, and as the Saviour, He stands unaltered through the vicissitudes of the ages. And it is just this permanence of the living, unchanging Christ that is the pledge and guarantee of the life of Christianity. Other religions have faded and passed away. Once, so the legend goes, along the winding shore of the blue Ægean Sea the mournful cry was heard, "Great Pan is dead." And the deities of classic Greece departed from their thrones, and the oracles left the temples, and the sprites of fountain and woodland were seen no more for ever. A religion died. And later again, far away in the desolate North, there sounded another yet more bitter cry, "Baldur is dead—Baldur the

Good, the Beautiful." And amid the terrific conflict of the twilight of the gods the old Scandinavian deities perished in their turn, and another religion died. Yes, many religions have died. But Christianity does not die and cannot die. For the life of Christianity is the Living One—the abiding, the unchanging, the imperishable One—"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

IV

OUR LORD'S IDEA OF BLESSEDNESS

"And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed . . ."—MATT. v. 2, 3.

IV

OUR LORD'S IDEA OF BLESSEDNESS

THAT is the first word. That is the keynote of the mountain-preaching. "Blessed." Not once, but nine times over, with most solemn iteration, does our Lord repeat that word. He seems to be struggling, with all the energy of thought and language, to drive this great idea deep into His disciples' mind. They are going to be blessed. They are called to "inherit a blessing." The Gospel is good news of Blessedness, now for the first time brought within their reach. So Jesus starts His preaching with a nine-fold benediction. And that is a grand beginning. "That is indeed," as Martin Luther says, "a fine, sweet, friendly beginning of His teaching and sermon."

Now I propose to inquire this morning, What is our Lord's idea of Blessedness? What is His doctrine of the Blessed Life? But before I approach the subject, I ought, perhaps, very briefly to touch on a critical difficulty. You have heard just now, my brethren, in the Gospel for this day, St. Matthew's account of the Beatitudes. But some of you may remember that our third Evangelist supplies us with another version, and one which contains some very

striking variations. For instance, St. Matthew gives eight Beatitudes, but St. Luke gives only four: in St. Matthew the form is general—"Blessed are the poor in spirit," but in St. Luke it is direct and personal, "Blessed are ye poor": and lastly, while St. Matthew's blessings are attached to inward spiritual states, St. Luke's blessings, in the literal wording at least, are attached to mere outward conditions—to actual poverty, actual hunger and sorrow and persecution. Now, in the presence of such differences, it is certainly not unnatural that the question should be raised, Which of these two versions should we attribute to our Lord? And yet I cannot but think that the differences and the difficulties have been much exaggerated. It may be true that St. Luke's report is, taken as a whole, closer to the letter of the Saviour's utterance. It may be true that the Beatitudes in St. Matthew have been expanded a little to bring out their fullest meaning, and their original number enlarged by one or two sayings spoken by Jesus at another time. But surely there ought to be no reasonable doubt that the spirit and intention of the Saviour's teaching are preserved with perfect faithfulness by the first evangelist. Here, in St. Matthew, is the right interpretation of the terse and figurative sentences of St. Luke. Here we may gain real insight into the genuine mind of Christ. And here, if anywhere, we should seek for the solution of our problem, What has our Lord to teach us concerning Blessedness and the Blessed Life?

Jesus Christ sat upon the mountain side. Far down below His feet there stirred and struggled the great world of men. And as our Lord looked down upon the throng, so anxious and fretful, so restless and impatient, He saw each single one of that huge company possessed and ridden by a vehement desire—for Happiness, Self-satisfaction, Blessedness. Everyone longed to be blessed. Everyone sought in all possible directions for that which should make him blessed. Yet none seemed to know what Blessedness was, or where it might be found. But Jesus was up on the hillside, out in the morning, and His sight was perfectly clear. All that there was to know about the Blessed Life He knew; all that He knew He was prepared to tell. "And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed . . ."

But now comes something strange, something new and paradoxical. As the Master goes on, He provokes an extreme amazement. Why, He begins by denying and defying, one by one, all the estimates, ideals, and standards of Blessedness which had hitherto prevailed; and He actually proclaims to be the happiest of all exactly those people who were generally accounted as of all most miserable. Try and put yourselves, my brethren, in the place of our Lord's contemporaries, and conceive the profound impression that His utterances would produce. Here was the Greek, entranced by the lore of sages, the songs of the poets, worshipping beauty and art and reason and the balanced intellect, making the highest good consist in

a life enriched to the very utmost with all the varied treasure of experience and knowledge. And Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit"! Or here was the Roman, insolently proud and insatiable of conquest, whose mighty arms reached out over cities and kingdoms, gathering all the peoples of the world a helpless prey. And Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek"! Or here was the Jew, wrapt in sweet dreams of national prosperity and earthly greatness, thrilling with passionate hope that the rod of the oppressor would ere long be broken, and Israel crowned forever on the high throne of the nations. And Jesus said, "Blessed are the persecuted"! But why do we single out particular ideals and individual aspirations? Is it not a fact that from the very beginning and fount of human history there streams, as it were, a vast torrent of conviction that Blessedness is found in prosperity, in enjoyments long drawn out, in freedom from sorrow and pain and humiliation and suffering? Yet Jesus sat upon the Mount and said, "Blessed are the mourners"! See how He discards the ordinary ideals. All the conventional notions He sweeps clean away. In manifest defiance of the wisdom of the ages, in pointed contradiction of the traditions of the race, He says that Blessedness inheres in that which all men shrink from as the ground of misery. Such is the stupefying paradox of Jesus.

But let us look more closely at this teaching. What, in the first place, according to our Lord, is the

cause or the condition of the Blessed Life? And, secondly, in what exactly does its Blessedness consist?

Now the conditions of Blessedness you will find set forth with fulness in the first half of each Beatitude. Blessed, says Jesus, are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the hungry for righteousness; blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and they who are unsoured by injury and wrong. In these descriptions, I say, you may trace our Lord's conditions of the Blessed Life. And when you come to consider them attentively, you will find that they are all of them just states, or modes, or aspects, of a character. They are not, as might appear at first, so many different characters, each separate and distinct, but so many manifestations of the same character, viewed in different lights. The forms, no doubt, are many, but the type throughout is one. And therefore, on the last analysis, the various conditions of obtaining Blessedness resolve themselves quite simply into one condition; and that one condition is a character, schooled in humility, matured by suffering, instinct with gentleness and purity and love.

And here, at the very outset, our Lord is teaching us a weighty lesson. He tells us that the condition of our Blessedness is within ourselves. Our felicity depends, not on what we have, but on what we are; not on position, but on disposition; not on the state of our circumstances, but on the state of our soul. In

short, the one and only thing which counts for the highest happiness is character. And I wonder how many of us realise that truth. There was an ancient pagan once who wrote in his book, "Blessed is he who possesses many goods." And there are plenty of modern pagans who still reiterate in practice and opinion that same pernicious formula: "Blessed is he who has health and wealth and fame and friends and a solid reputation and a fine establishment—who possesses many goods." But our Lord, you see, speaks otherwise. He says that this old popular pagan view is utterly false and misleading and absurd. Not a whole universe of things outside of a man can ever make that man happy. No; it is character, and wholly character, and only character, that determines human bliss.

But what is this character? Can we sum up in one comprehensive word the quality of this character to which Blessedness belongs? Is there a single epithet in our vocabulary by which its essential principle can with adequateness be expressed? My brethren, I think there is. And the word that I choose is "Christlike." The blessed character is the Christlike character. Take the Beatitudes as a whole: that whole is a representation of the character of Christ. Or take them singly; you discover some feature of Christ in every one of them. Was He not poor in spirit, who with infinite condescension "took upon Him the form of a servant," and "for your sakes became poor, that ye through His poverty might be

rich"? Did He not mourn, who "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses"? Was He not "meek and lowly in heart"? Did He not hunger for righteousness, whose "meat" was to do His heavenly Father's will? Yes, in each and in all of those wonderful, vivid sentences, we can scarcely fail to recognise the lineaments of Jesus. They are portrait sentences, verses of rich description, and we only understand them in the fulness of their meaning, when we study them as illumined by the Speaker's Personality. And then, indeed, this central truth stands plain and clear—that all our chance of Blessedness depends on whether or not we are conformed to Jesus Christ. It is only the Christlike character that is blessed. It is only the Christlike people that receive the promise. Our single hope of happiness, our sole salvation, is to do as Christ did, to live as Christ lived, to be what Christ is.

And there is just one other point you ought to notice. This Christlike character, that makes for Blessedness, is meant to be developed, not under ideal circumstances in an ideal world, but here, among ordinary, dull, depressing, unreformed surroundings; in the midst of sin and sorrow, in the midst of every kind of evil and distressing influence. Some of you, possibly, fancy that you cannot attain Beatitude amid all the unfavourable conditions in which you find yourselves. You long for a peaceful heaven and a sheltered harbour. You would fain take the wings of a dove and fly away and be at rest. And yet, in this

very thought and aspiration, you are making the great mistake. Our Lord has not a word of blessing for untempted saints, beyond the reach of storm and stress and conflict. He blesses the men and women that are battling in the world. He blesses them where they are. He blesses them, not because they run away from their environment, but because they make the best of it, because they rightly respond to it, rightly react on it, conquer it and triumph over it. And He tells them that this very environment—evil and pain and all—is precisely the seed-ground of the Blessed Life, precisely the chosen means for developing the character which is destined to be blessed. "Our crown," as the ancient martyrs used to say, "blooms on the thorns which lacerate our brows." But if this be so, my brethren, then you and I and everyone may be numbered with the blessed. The troubles that perplex us, our fears and our vexations, the dull, humiliating round of daily tasks and duties —all may contribute to build up in us just that character to which Blessedness belongs. The way of the Blessed Life thus opens out for all. The Gospel is in very truth a Gospel for the million. It is the good news of Blessedness awaiting every man.

We have learnt, then, the condition of the Blessed Life. And now we must turn for a moment to the Blessedness itself—the felicity which our Lord associates with the character that He specifies. What is this Blessedness? And in what does it consist?

Now just as the condition of Blessedness is

described in the first half of each Beatitude, so the essence or content of Blessedness is described in the last half of each Beatitude. And you will probably remember that the first of the blessings which our Lord proclaims is this: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And the last of the blessings which our Lord proclaims again is this: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of heaven, then, according to our Lord is the beginning and end of Blessedness. It includes all other blessings. It contains all particular goods. From it proceed all the rest of the Beatitudes, like rays of light that emanate from a central glory. There is abounding consolation for the mourners; there is the certainty of victory for the meek; there is satisfaction for those that crave for righteousness; there is compassionate acceptance of the merciful; there the Beatific Vision enraptures the pure in heart; there the peacemakers are owned and recognised as the sons of the Most High. Thus every form of Blessedness, adapted to every phase of the blessed character, is found within this kingdom. In the teaching of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven and Blessedness are one.

But who can expound this figure? Are we to think of this most royal Blessedness as something only of the distant future, only to be achieved when all the frets and frictions of our life are over, and we ourselves have passed into the stillness of the land beyond the grave? Is this kingdom, with its graces and its beauties and its dignities, ever away amid the

golden light of sunset on the line of the horizon? My brethren, surely not. "The kingdom of God," says Jesus, "is among you." Blessed, He says again, are those of whom He speaks, "for theirs is"—not shall be by and by—"the kingdom." We are not to wait for our happiness. We may have it now—still perhaps in part and under certain limitations, yet with a deep assurance that the world can never shake. Already are the children of the kingdom blessed.

Yet still does this figure puzzle us—this symbol of "the kingdom"? One of the greatest of the German theologians explains it thus: "it is God Himself in His power." And the phrase, I think, is worth a score of learned definitions. What Christ proposes as our highest Blessedness is nothing less than God Himself—God to complete the imperfection of our nature, God to supply our deficiencies and to supplement our insufficiencies, God to produce and develope all that is fair in us and to extirpate utterly all that is foul in us, God to enable us to realise our proper ends and accomplish our true destiny—"God Himself in His power." How precious beyond estimate is this gift so freely offered! What more is left that we can seek or hope or long for, when God Himself is ours? Are we poor and needy? Then all the resources of God are placed at our disposal. Are we lonely, bereft, forsaken? The Infinite Soul holds converse with our soul, and breathes a comfort deeper than words can utter. Does trouble come upon us or danger threaten? Does the malice of men make us

fearful and disturbed? Still God Omnipotent remains our refuge, and underneath forever are the everlasting arms. Here—here in God, then, is the goal of all our striving. Here the desire of the heart at length is satisfied. In God, and in our sense of God, our Blessedness consists. The able author of a recent book has put this very beautifully. "What Jesus saw," he writes, "and what He would have us see is: all the eternal love that God the Father is, ours: all the infinite grace that God the Son is, ours: all the perfect fellowship or oneness with ourselves that God the Holy Ghost is, ours. If all this is ours, then all things are ours, and all Blessedness is indeed ours."

This, brethren, it seems to me, is what our Saviour meant by Blessedness. This is His doctrine of the Blessed Life. And down the centuries, from His time to our own, the thought of the Master is echoed, while countless witnesses, of every country and of every age, rise up and attest its truth. You may listen to St. Augustine. "Thou hast formed us for Thyself," he cries, "and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee." Or you may read the words of Pascal: "Happiness is neither without us nor within us; it is in God, both without us and within us." Or you may take the saying of Goethe: "To recognise God, wheresoever and howsoever He reveals Himself, that is true Blessedness on earth." Or you may open your *Sartor Resartus* and ponder this sentence of Thomas Carlyle: "Love not pleasure; love God. This is the Everlasting Yea, in which all contradiction

is solved: wherein whoso walks and works it is well with him." Do not these all reflect the teaching of our Gospel? The soul possessing and possessed by God alone is blessed.

I would add but one word more. On all Saints' Day we naturally revert to the thought of Blessedness. We call to our remembrance that great army of the faithful—martyrs and doctors, missionaries and reformers, righteous kings and holy bishops and heavenly minded writers—who, with faith unwavering, with splendid confidence, ventured their all upon the promises of Jesus, and found by most blessed experience that His promises do not fail. We call to mind that even greater host of saints less known to history, "martyrs in the martyrdom of daily life, saints in the saintliness of homely duty," humble and human men and women who have lived and worked amongst us, and whose visible Blessedness, often in the midst of poignant suffering, we have watched with wonder and admiring awe. And while we contemplate these lives and these examples, there comes to us out of the past a belief and sure conviction that the same rare Blessedness, which we see in them, may be even ours. We too are called to blessing. For us too are the promises. Before us, as before the saints, the glorious hope shines clear. If we like them will but follow the way of Jesus, if we like them will accept the condition of Jesus, if we like them will submit to the yoke and take up the cross of Jesus, then we like them most certainly shall find

that Blessedness, joy, and rest which Jesus guarantees. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

V

THE SELF-EDUCATION OF OUR LORD

"Jesus increased in wisdom."—LUKE ii. 52.

V

THE SELF-EDUCATION OF OUR LORD

IT has been said by an eminent scholar that our Gospels ought not in strictness to be called biographies of our Lord. They do not give us, nor do they attempt to give us, a detailed history of His wondrous life. A few stories of the infancy, one lovely little narrative of the Child among the doctors, an outline sketch of the brief activities of the last three years—this, strangely enough, is absolutely all that our authorities supply. By far the greater portion of the life of our blessed Lord is a simple blank. The writers of the records, absorbed in the message of "good news" which they proclaimed, absorbed in the glorious mystery of Jesus Himself, absorbed in expressing what He was and did for men, have passed over almost in silence the facts and incidents of most of His career. The veil that screens Him is continually let down. The inquiries alike of devoted adoration and of irreverent curiosity are vouchsafed no answer.

And yet, after all, can we say nothing of those hidden years? May we not, at least with a reasonable probability, conjecture somewhat of the blossom-

ing and unfolding of Christ's perfect life? Is it not possible from His later words and actions to divine just a little of what went before? Such an attempt may not be wholly fruitless, and for carrying it out the words of my text perhaps afford a clue. "Jesus increased in wisdom." Those silent years were the Master's growing-time, His time of preparation. He was making ready for His mighty work. All that long while He was developing incessantly—strengthening in body, growing in mind and spirit. It was the period, if one may sum up everything in a single phrase, of the self-education of Jesus.

In following this path, my brethren, we must tread with caution. We cannot believe that the mind of the Man, who is also God, can have opened, enlarged, matured in precisely the way that merely human minds mature. We cannot admit that, even in the days of His flesh, the inner experience of Christ was exactly the same as ours. Surely from the very beginning He must have had some special, some Divine endowment—some consciousness at least of His unique relation to His heavenly Father—which it is not given to mere man to harbour. And yet, however carefully we may guard the statement, the indubitable fact remains that Jesus grew. There was nothing portentous about Him. Sin only excepted, He was perfectly human. His manhood sprang out of a youth, which sprang in its turn from a boyhood and a childhood, and His wisdom throughout corresponded with His years. All was most real, most natural,

most unforced. By action and experience, He gradually developed the vast potencies that were in Him, He gradually realised in the details and particulars that which from the first implicitly He possessed. Jesus did not stand still—He grew. Hallowing all the stages of our human progress, the Lord Incarnate, with the ripening of His years, "increased in wisdom."

Let us notice this morning one or two of the principal means or aids by which this self-education must have been carried on.

I

In the first place, I suppose, there can scarcely be a doubt that "Jesus increased in wisdom" through intercourse with Books. He was not, it is true, what the people of the period would have called a scholar. He never was sent to a rabbinic college, or sat, like St. Paul, as a regular pupil, in "the House of the Midrash." He was only a poor countryman, whose home was probably but a single room—a working carpenter. He made ploughs and yokes, a tradition relates, for the farmers of Nazareth, and he had not the time for scholastic courses and degrees. Yet, in spite of these facts you must not imagine that our Saviour was untaught. The Jews of His day were exceedingly zealous in the cause of education. The great rabbi Hillel not long before had said that "an ignorant man can never be really pious"; and the apophthegm of another doctor has it that "the world

exists by the breath of school-children." Some kind of instruction, therefore, Jesus surely had. And, moreover, he studied. He was thoroughly acquainted with the history, the law, the poetry of His people; He was not unversed even in the curious learning of the scribal schools. At a later time, indeed, men said to one another, in astonishment at His wisdom, "Is not this the carpenter? Whence hath this man these things?"

But let us go still further. Research, my brethren, can point out for our edification what were the very books the Master studied while He lived on earth. The beginning of His training was undoubtedly the Law, and the first text that He ever learned was taken from the Book of Deuteronomy. As a very little child, almost as soon as He could speak, He was taught by His Mother to repeat by heart that solemn affirmation of the unity of God and the absolute devotion that His people owe Him. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." That was our Lord's first text. As He grew older He mastered other passages, and from the age of twelve He was accustomed, like every other pious Jew, to recite each morning and evening a portion of nineteen verses, selected from the Books of Deuteronomy and Numbers. These were for Jesus, at any rate, in His youth, what the Lord's prayer is for us—the invariable beginning and ending of the day.

But the books ascribed to Moses were not the only ones that Jesus knew. If we accept as genuinely our Lord's the allusions to the Scriptures which the evangelists attribute to Him, then He must have been familiar with the earlier histories of the Bible and with several of the prophets—with Jeremiah and Hosea, with Jonah and Zechariah and Malachi. Possibly, also, He read some more modern works, not included in our canon—the Apocalypse of Enoch, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Psalms of Solomon—the names and contents of which to-day are remembered by few save scholars. But the favourites of all—the books which our Lord pre-eminently studied and most dearly loved—appear to have been three. The first was the hymn-book of the Synagogue, the Psalms. And the second was Isaiah, particularly that part which tells of that innocent Servant of Jehovah who "hath borne our griefs," who "was bruised for our iniquities," and by whose "stripes we are healed." The third was the prophet Daniel. These three—so far as it is possible to form a judgment—were the chosen books of Jesus.

It may be, brethren, that to some of you the election of the last will seem just a little strange. For Daniel in our modern times is scarcely popular. Its imagery is lacking in the element of beauty, and its apocalyptic visions are obscure and unattractive. Yet Daniel contains at least one splendid passage with which, undoubtedly, our Lord was much impressed: "Behold one like unto a son of man came with the clouds of

heaven . . . and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom . . . and his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." What striking words! Can we not fancy how they flashed upon the soul of Christ with self-revealing, self-illuminating force? Why, He was that "son of man"; His was that promised kingdom; in Him that prophecy was about to be fulfilled; in His own self, the Bearer of the kingdom, would the kingdom come. And so it seems, for the sake of that prediction, our blessed Lord delighted in the Book of Daniel. And in after-days, when engaged upon His ministry, He chose as His own peculiar title Daniel's name, "the Son of Man," and the blessings which He brought He was wont to sum up compendiously in Daniel's phrase "the kingdom"—the kingdom of God.

Thus Jesus pondered the old Jewish books. To Him they were the veritable Word of God, helping Him to interpret that which half-consciously was stirring in Him, helping Him to pass from reminiscence into knowledge, helping Him to penetrate the deepest mysteries of the Divine nature and the Divine decrees. He used them constantly as a heaven-given guide, and by using them thus He became what He was, overcame as He did. And should not we learn a lesson from those studies? In these days of trivial reading, when literature of solid worth is being steadily displaced by a multiplication of newspapers and magazines; in these days of casual reading, when there is

so much inconsiderate glancing into books, but so little honest, serious perusal of them; in these days of secular reading, when any new view or theory gains attention, while the Word of the Living God too often utters itself only to dull and inattentive ears, it surely should rebuke our frivolous carelessness to reflect that the Incarnate Lord Himself was a zealous and constant student of the best and greatest books. By the love He had for them, by the thought He gave to them, by the truth He found in them, even He "of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write" increased in wisdom.

II

But, again, "Jesus increased in wisdom" through intercourse with Nature. His eyes were continually open to the glories of nature round Him, and His mind was peculiarly sensitive to the truths that nature taught. The wholesome air of the hills and fields of Galilee breathes ever in His utterance. Nor shall we wonder at it when we recall the fact that most of the life of Jesus was passed amid scenes of beauty. Nazareth itself, no doubt, was a mean enough place—a cluster of flat-roofed dwellings, steep streets, and crooked crossways, huddled together in an amphitheatre of chalky hills. Yet spreading all round were lands of such rich fertility that an old-time traveller likened them to Paradise. Here were green gardens and luxuriant cornfields. Here was abundance of olives and fig-trees and vines. Here, too, were

streams, and variegated flowers, and herbs of sweet perfume. Above and behind the town there rose a hill, which Jesus in His youth must many a time have climbed. And from its summit one might gaze on a magnificent panorama of plain and vine-clad valley, of mountain-peak and river gorge, and the blue of a distant sea. For thirty years it was the prospect of our Lord. Upon that hill, swept by refreshing breezes—the grass beneath, the azure heights above—the Saviour felt His soul expand in sympathy with nature, in which He saw reflected—oh, so clearly—the loving-kindness of His Father's heart.

You, brethren, who are familiar with the discourses and parables must often, surely, have been struck with admiration at our Lord's keen observation of the external world. How closely He watched the common processes of nature! How well He understood them! How vivid was His interest in the things He saw! Not even the smallest of earth's sights and sounds escaped Him. He marked the brilliance of the red anemones, the green blade breaking through the sun-dried soil, the bush that springs up from the tiny mustard-seed, the bearded darnel growing amid the wheat. He knew what happens to the handfuls which the sower casts—some among the stones, and some among the brambles, and some on good ground, there to bring forth a hundredfold. He noted, too, the habits of birds and animals—how the hen spreads her wings over her young; how the lamb strays away and is lost; how the sparrow, uncared for by man

yet lives and multiplies. He was aware of the peasant's signs of the weather, and remarked that the ploughman ought not to lift up his eyes from his task. A hundred instances, which must occur to all of you, prove incontestably how near and how dear was this natural world to the soul of the Christ. Nothing in nature, not the least of its phenomena, was foreign or uninteresting to this Son of Man.

But Jesus not only observed. He was not concerned with collecting mere facts, barren items of knowledge. He considered; He learnt. To Him the world of appearance, with all its rich variety of form and colouring, was mainly significant as a holy symbol, a wondrous apparition of eternal truth. It was to Him the expression of the thought of God, a transparent veil which gloriously revealed, even while it seemed to hide, His Father's face. Everything served to disclose to Him that Father. The rain and sunshine signified His goodness; the birds and flowers bore witness to His gracious care; the lake, the trees, the wind-swept hill, the life within the heights—these carried indications of a Presence, of an infinite Power and Love pervading all things. Even the little grass that fringed the mountain rocks was eloquent of God. Thus nature to our Lord was a perpetual revelation. Always and everywhere He found His Father, and finding His Father, watching His Father's working in His Father's world, the well-beloved Son "increased in wisdom."

How original, my brethren, and how wonderfully

instructive is this nature-view of Jesus! Not in the crabbed wisdom of the rabbi, nor even in sweetest song of Israelitish psalmist is thought so deep as this. Christ is the first to point us to the heart of things. He found us standing, as it were, in nature's outer court, waiting in awe and wonder for the portals to be opened. And He carried us within. He showed us the great mysteries. He made us see the universal Spirit moving and working in the silent depths. He bade us leave awhile our stupid literalism, our little narrow outside points of view, and ponder larger meanings. "Consider the lilies," He said. "Let the beauties of the morning and the evening be your teachers, and learn through them to know the absolute Beauty and the eternal Love." There is a saying not reported in our Gospels which none the less seems faithfully to express the thought, and perhaps the experience, of our Lord. "Jesus saith, Who are they that draw us to the kingdom if the kingdom is in heaven? The fowls of the air, and all beasts that are under the earth or upon the earth, and the fishes of the sea, these are they that draw you."

III

And then, once more, "Jesus increased in wisdom" through intercourse with Men and Women. Our Lord was not denied such means of self-education as companionship affords. He never was a solitary. He loved, indeed, the quietness of the deserts and the

hills, but He also loved the breathing crowds, the eager populations of the villages and towns, the busy life of the streets. He was bred, you must remember, in a country town. At fountain and in market-place He mingled with the people, and with searching, questioning gaze He studied them. The farmer, the slave, the officer of justice, the dealer in pearls on the sea, the long-robed Pharisee and the anxious housewife, the labourer waiting to be hired and the criminal dragging along his heavy cross—all the types He knew. And was it not fitting that He who became pre-eminently the Friend of man should first Himself have gained experience of man? Was it not right that He who became, as no other may become, man's Teacher, should first have taught Himself by accurate observation what man's spirit is? For thirty years Jesus stood patiently with open eyes and watched the world pass by. For thirty years He studied human nature—marked its greatness, marked its littleness, marked the variety of its draping forms, its vast potentialities, its pitiful realities. And at the end of the years His knowledge of mankind, we learn, was deep and thorough. "He needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man."

Let us notice more closely two of the most important of these human influences on the growing life of Jesus. The first was the home. Beautiful fancies, swift at the summons of religious art, have woven bright strands of glory round that humble house at Nazareth, and fond imaginings of saintly hearts have

striven to vest it with a more than earthly splendour. And yet how scanty are the actual facts we know! Joseph, at least, and they who are designated "brethren" of the Lord are scarcely more than names; and the memory of their retired and simple lives, their unchronicled comings and goings in "the White Town on Hill," can no longer be revived. It is certain, however, that the home of Jesus was a pious home. His Mother and His kinsmen were devout and earnest people, who zealously kept the law and anxiously looked for the consolation of Israel. Year after year Joseph went up to Jerusalem for the Passover, and Mary went, too, though the presence of women appears not to have been obligatory. Again, if we may trust a fragment of an ancient Gospel, it was Mary and His brethren who first invited Jesus to go with them to the Baptist. "Behold the Mother of the Lord and His brethren spake unto Him saying, John the Baptist is baptizing for the forgiveness of sins; we will go and be baptized of him." And so once more we learn from an early historian that one of these so-called "brethren," James, was afterwards so noted for his holiness and asceticism, his love of the Temple and his constant prayers, that he was honoured even by the unbelieving Jews, and received the name of "Just." Thus everything suggests that there was vigorous, vital piety in that home of Nazareth. It was no unfitting school in which the Holy One of God might learn as pupil His first earthly lessons of human religion and of human love. And may we not imagine

that the beautiful allusions which our Saviour later made to family life and family affection were tinged with the colour of a tender reminiscence? and further that His doctrine of service, of mutual subjection and subordination in love, embalmed some experiences of those early years, when He Himself was subject to His "parents," and was glad to do their will? It may, indeed, be so. One thing, at any rate, is sure—the little, bright-eyed Child, growing so thoughtfully in good Joseph's house, "increased in wisdom."

But next to the home there stood the synagogue, and this, we may believe, was a second important factor in the self-education of Christ. Here ruled the Pharisees, the proud and subtle men who sat in the seat of Moses and boasted themselves children of the faithful Abraham. Sabbath by Sabbath Jesus would listen to their skilled disputes, mark their fantastic explanations of the Law, hear them expound, with deep yet childish wisdom, their favourite dogmas of a resurrection, of predestination, of the coming Messiah and the triumph of Jehovah. Probably, too, He learned from scribal lips great scribal maxims. One day it may have been the saying of Antigonus, "Be as servants who serve the master without view to reward"; another, perhaps, the famous law of Hillel, "What thou wouldst not have thy neighbour do to thee, do not thou to thy neighbour." And as He listened to those earthly teachers, what trains of divine ideas must have swept with an awful grandeur through the temple of His soul! What light from

God streamed down upon Him through the mist of words, like summer sunshine breaking through an obscuring cloud! Yet still He waited quietly for thirty years —listened, and learned, and pondered while the doctors taught. Then, at the very last, He went His way, sweeping aside the chaff and dust of rabbinism, bursting the fetters of its forms outworn, and pouring from the depths of His immeasurable consciousness a doctrine fresh as the light, sublime as the heaven, divine as God.

Thus Jesus learned through people—through them, I think it is most fitting we should say, rather than directly from them. No man, indeed, can be said to have been His master. He never leant His weight on any human teacher or borrowed His marvellous thoughts from fallible human minds. Yet many, we may suppose, by the special providence of Almighty God, were made in a measure helps and aids to Him. Through them as instruments He was taught of God. In human accents, feeble and broken though they often were, He caught the echo of His Father's voice; and in the acts and manifold experiences of human lives He saw His Father's kindly, guiding hand directing Him securely along paths of truth.

My brethren, we have touched to-day the fringe of a great mystery—the mystery of the growth and self-education of our blessed Lord. We have touched but the fringe: the centre no power of thought avails to penetrate. Think who this Being is who willed to take unto Himself our human limitations—the Word,

the Truth, the Light, the Son, begotten of His Father before all worlds, Very God of Very God. And then once more behold the Man of Nazareth, toiling through hours of daylight at the humble trade of carpenter, and afterwards at evening, when the work is done, poring intently over sacred scrolls, or wandering deep in reverie on the hills beneath the stars, or mingling in the society of His unwitting fellow-townsmen, and all the while, as the record plainly tells us, growing, increasing, developing in wisdom. Is it not baffling to us—this condition of the Incarnation? Is it not all inexplicable? The mind recoils before the thought of such transcendent contradiction. Here is a point where knowledge and even speculation cease.

Yet while we revere the mystery, let us not forget its practical significance. "Jesus increased in wisdom"; and His development is the creative type of ours. He gave the standard. He taught us what the true fulfilling of our nature is. He showed us how to utilise all knowledge and experience as means and avenues to the life divine. And, finally, by His wonderful example He prepared us to think God's thought which is Truth, to will God's will which is Right, to thrill with the thrilling of the everlasting Love, and so, through development in harmony with God, to be consciously His sons, to be partakers of His Spirit. This is the lesson of our Saviour's growth. This is the secret of the thirty years. "Jesus increased in wisdom" that we, His brethren, too, in wisdom might increase, and grow in favour with both God and man.

VI

THE SPIRITUAL CHRIST

"The Spirit of Jesus Christ."—PHIL. i. 19.

VI

THE SPIRITUAL CHRIST

LAST Thursday we commemorated the Ascension of our Lord. That event—however we may interpret it in detail—was the solemn termination of the Saviour's earthly ministry. It marked His final exit from the world of sense, the formal close of His visible intercourse with men. Never again would Christ be known "in the body of His flesh." No more would the woman find Him sitting by the well; no more would the fishers see Him standing on the shore; no more would His footsteps echo in the Temple courts, or the sound of His voice be heard on the mountains of Galilee. The Jesus of history vanishes from sight. He had lived and suffered and died and been victorious over death; and now, having finished all His earthly work, He passes, amid circumstances impressively symbolic, to the eternal world, to be enthroned through all the ages at the right hand of God.

And yet, my brethren, if from one point of view the Ascension marks an end, it may be regarded no less truly as a fresh beginning. For there is no real end, no possible conclusion, to the life and work of

Christ. The gospel is emphatically a gospel of beginnings. The whole history of Christianity is a history of beginnings. In our religion always last leads to first, death changes into life, departure is but the prelude to return, paradise lost becomes paradise regained. There is always something more in store, something larger and higher—new horizons and prospects and opportunities and blessings. And so, as I said, if the Ascension is an end, it is also the preparation of a fresh beginning. Men lost, indeed, the Christ according to the flesh, but henceforth they were to find the Christ according to the Spirit. In particular places and at special times they would meet their dear Master no more, but henceforth it was their privilege to company with One of whom they could always say, "He is here, ever with me and within me." When the historical Jesus departed, it was only in order that He might come to men anew in an inward, universal, and abiding form. As Bishop Westcott writes;—"By the Ascension Christ in His humanity is brought close to every one of us, and the words 'in Christ,' the very charter of our faith, gain a present power."

Let us take as our subject this morning The Spiritual Christ. What, let us ask, is the Spiritual Christ to us? And what is—or what should be—our relation to Him?

Now in the first place I would emphasise one rather obvious truth. I would remind you—for the men of this generation really need to be reminded—

that the Spiritual Christ is essentially Christ still present with us. I think in these days of historical study and historical criticism that we tend too much to think of our Lord as belonging to the past. We picture Him realistically. We revive the scenes and customs of His Palestine environment. We consider His teaching in its original associations. With the help of the vast resources of modern scholarship and learning, we seek to get to know Christ as He once was long ago. It is all very interesting and valuable and educative. And yet we may well beware lest, by dwelling so particularly on the Jesus of the past, we unwittingly dull our perception of the Jesus of the present. For, after all, the very pith and point of our religion lies in this—that the Master is not gone. That gracious fellowship He vouchsafed to men most certainly did not cease when He went up to God. Nay, even to-day a power from Him flows in upon us—not the pale influence of one departed, but a living force proceeding from a living Person. The Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit which dwelt and still dwells without measure in Jesus, the Spirit which entered and which enters still into all that He was and is, His very own Spirit, is sent by Jesus to us. And because the Spirit, the Breath inseparable from the life of Christ, is here, therefore Christ, whose the Spirit is, is present here Himself.

Why, then, do we look back so fixedly to the historical Christ of earth? or why strain our sight for some glimpse of the exalted Christ of heaven? Can

we not trust Him when He tells us He is here? "I am with you alway," He said. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." "Wherever there is one alone," He is reported to have said, "I am with him. Raise the stone and there thou shalt find me, cleave the wood and there am I." Surely if the recorded promises of Jesus Christ are true, if the figures and analogies that He used about Himself are true, if Jesus Christ is truly what He said that He would be—our Bread and Water and Life, the Vine of which we are the branches—then Jesus Christ is not departed from our midst, but is actually with men to-day as much as He ever was, perfecting individuals, sanctifying society, redeeming the race.

"Where the many toil and suffer,
  There am I among mine own;
Where the tired workman sleepeth,
  There am I with him alone.
Never more thou needest seek Me,
  I am with thee everywhere:
Raise the stone, and thou shalt find Me;
  Cleave the wood, and I am there."

"The Christian religion," writes one of our theologians, "depends not on what Christ was merely, but on what He is; not simply on what He did, but on what He does." And it is this unswerving belief in Christ's presence and activity that uniquely characterises all the saints of all the centuries. You may turn, for example, to the pages of the New Testament; you may ask how the apostolic writers think

of Christ—and what do you find? Not one of them conceives of Him as belonging to the past. It is not the Carpenter of Nazareth, it is not the Prophet of Galilee, it is not even the Sufferer of Calvary that fires their faith and calls out their devotion; it is He who has been, indeed, all these, but is now the ever-present, ever-potent Lord of Grace. "To me," cries St. Paul,—and he speaks for all the apostles—"to me life is Christ." Or passing by such witnesses as St. Augustine and St. Bernard, as St. Teresa and À Kempis, you may come to modern times and modern testimonies. You find a man like Phillips Brooks writing in this wise to his friend—"All experience comes to be but more and more of pressure of Christ's life on ours. . . . I cannot tell you how personal this grows to me. He is here. He knows me, and I know Him. It is no figure of speech. It is the realest thing in the world." Or again, you read the words, so carefully weighed and chosen, of Forbes Robinson of Cambridge. "When I get quite quiet, and my mind is sane, and my conscience at rest, when I almost stop thinking and listen, I am quite sure that a Personal Being comes to me, and as He comes, brings some of His own life to flow into my life." Such persons, it is well-nigh impossible for us to doubt, had somehow a first-hand knowledge of a present Christ. And you, if you will, each one of you, may attain that knowledge too. And so may I. And so may all men.

But notice a further point. The Spiritual Christ

is not only Christ present with us; He is Christ present within us. He comes, not merely to, but into us, as the Indweller of our souls. He comes to make His spirit ours, His mind ours, all the energies and riches of His being ours, until, in the apostle's phrase, the very Christ be "formed" in us, until He become, as it were, reincarnate in us, while we grow up into the fulness of His stature. A great religious writer of the eighteenth century has expressed this very beautifully. "This holy Jesus," he says, "that is to be formed in thee, that is to be the Saviour and new life of thy soul, that is to raise thee out of the darkness of death into the light of life, and give thee power to become a son of God, is already within thee, living, stirring, calling, knocking at the door of thy heart, and wanting nothing but thine own faith and goodwill, to have as real a birth and form in thee as He had in the Virgin Mary."

And here at length we reach the deep, peculiar mystery of the Spiritual Christ. We begin at last to see why it was "expedient" for the disciples that the Master should go away. Of course, even before His Ascension our Lord was a mighty influence; but (so far as we can judge) He seems to have worked on men from without. He held, indeed, their thoughts and roused their wills and touched their feelings, He encouraged them for good desires and high achievements; yet His action at this time was, in a manner, external. It was the action, one might say perhaps, of a Leader and a Prophet, of a commanding Indi-

vidual in the midst of other individuals; not yet the action of the "quickening Spirit" that mingles indescribably with human spirits, and is wondrously identified with all that we are and do. That was the change which the Ascension heralded. Christ by His Spirit now draws near to men within. He enters into Christians. He unites Himself with Christians. He "pervades them," in Newman's words, "as light pervades a dwelling, or a sweet perfume the folds of some honourable robe." He so penetrates and permeates them, so occupies and possesses them, is so bound up with them and so made one with them, that each can say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Do you remember how Robert Browning has described the fusing together of two human personalities?

> "At first, 'twas something our two souls
> Should mix as mists do; each is sucked
> In each now: on the new stream rolls
> Whatever rocks obstruct."

Even thus we may say (though all analogies are inadequate) is the blending of Christ's Spirit with the spirit of the Christian.

> "Draw if thou canst the mystic line
> Severing rightly His from thine—
> Which is human, which Divine."

This, then, is the Christ who claims the love and worship of the men and women of this century. It is no antiquarian figure, no dead founder of a

religion, but a Christ really living within us, a Christ really personal to each of us, a Christ whom we really know inwardly and experimentally. "Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet." And you may be very sure, my brethren, that unless Christ is in this manner something in you, He is nothing to you. He may provoke your interest as a character in history, or He may perplex your intellect as a problem of theology, or He may excite your sentiment as a theme of art and poetry, but He has no real, ransoming, redeeming power for you, until He be found alive within your own experience.

> "Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born,
> But not within thyself, thy soul shall be forlorn;
> The cross of Golgotha thou lookest to in vain,
> Unless within thyself it be set up again."

It only remains now that we ask ourselves the question, What should be our relation, what our attitude, towards the Spiritual Christ? Though much might well be said, I can here do no more than point out two plain and practical duties. And the first of them is this. We should train ourselves to recognise the Spiritual Christ—to distinguish fact from fancy, the real Christ who veritably lives and works in us from the unreal Christ created by our own subjective moods and fond imaginings. We should learn first of all to be certain of Jesus. And how may this be done? Well, a similar difficulty once occurred to St. Teresa in respect of her voices and visions, and she thought out a solution. "That which purports to

come from God," she said, "is to be received only in so far as it corresponds with the sacred writings." And Teresa's test must be ours. The single means of verifying our own visions and experiences is the continual, careful study of the Figure in the Gospels. It is simply impossible that we can ever come to recognise the Spiritual Christ, unless we are familiar with the lineaments of the Historical Christ. It is simply impossible that we can ever get to know what the Christ of our consciousness is, unless we have first got to know what the Jesus of Galilee was. As Martin Luther puts it in his vigorous style—"The man who lets go of Christ's life and work, and desires now to seek Him in some private way, betrays Him afresh. He must seek Him as He was and walked on earth; then shall he find life." Yes, brethren; to interpret aright Christ's manifestation to ourselves, we must go back again and again to the study of the Gospels. It is there that we meet the authentic Christ by whom our experience is tested. It is there that we read His character. It is there that we learn His will. It is there that His Spirit is laid open and revealed. It is there that we find the material whereby we may now discern His presence and His power. "Back to the Gospels" must be the watchword of all ages. For these are the fountains of the heavenly knowledge, the deep, clear wells in which we may see reflected the faithful image of the Saviour.

And then as to our second duty. When once we have learned to recognise the Spiritual Christ, we

must make our response to Him; we must give ourselves up to Him; we must allow Him so to inform, so to dominate and control us, that our life may be positively a development of His life, and our actions a real "continuation" of His history. Our aim, in other words, is thoroughly to assimilate, to appropriate as our very own, the Spirit of Jesus. And let me just say in passing that such an appropriation of the Spirit of Jesus Christ is something much more than following in an external way our Lord's example. I cannot, indeed, but admire those devoted disciples, from St. Francis down to Tolstoi, who have striven with magnificent heroism to imitate the Master. I am not without sympathy with certain teachers of our day, who claim that all Christian conduct should be regulated by the standard, "What would Jesus do?" *Vitam Jesu Christi stude imitari* is an inspiring challenge. Yet I am none the less convinced that a literal reproduction of Christ's outward life and action is not what He desired. Can it really be held, for example, that we should have no fixed home, because the poor wandering Teacher had not where to lay His head? or that we should abstain from politics because He abstained from politics? or that we should be indifferent to art and secular literature because for Him these things had no apparent interest? Surely not. Christ seeks in us for originals, not for mechanical imitations. He asks us to repeat not the manner of His life but the principle of it, not the details but the type, not the form of it but its essence.

He never demands that we should copy His past; but He ever requires that we should "christen" our present, by appropriating and exhibiting in the twentieth century the Spirit—the self-same Spirit of love and grace and holiness—that He possessed and manifested with such perfection in the first.

Such, roughly, my brethren, seems the line of our duty towards the Spiritual Christ. To recognise Him when He comes and to welcome Him when He comes; to distinguish His voice and hearken to it; to discern His Spirit and receive Him joyfully—man can, perhaps, do no more. Let us see to it, however, that we do no less. Let us never forget that Christ is still coming in our day and generation; still seeking—always seeking—to be formed within our nature, to be wrought into our character, to become in us once more incarnate among men. And let us work and pray that our Immanuel may dwell with us effectually, as the Truth which claims our mind, as the Law which rules our will, as the Source of high emotions, and the Soul of the great society of the people of His Spirit. "Even so; come, Lord Jesus."

VII

THE LESSONS OF THE CROSS AND MODERN IDEAS

VII

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I

THE LESSON OF SIN

IT has been said by St. Augustine that "the wood on which were fixed the limbs of Him that was dying was even the chair of the Master that was teaching." In this and the two following addresses I shall attempt to gather up some fragments of this dying teaching and view them in relation to modern ideas and modern life. My subjects will be—the Lesson of Sin, the Lesson of Suffering, and the Lesson of Service.

To-night we have to consider what the Cross of Christ teaches us concerning sin. And this lesson, I think, will be twofold. We take our stand at Calvary and fix our eyes upon the Cross, and we learn, to begin with, something of what sin is—the sin of the world which crucified its Saviour and its God. And then, as we still gaze steadfastly on the Cross and its

awful Burden, we learn a little not only of the nature of sin, but also of the means by which we may yet be delivered therefrom. We see how the tree of death becomes transformed into a tree of life, whose fruit and leaves are for the healing of the nations, how the type of ignominy, disgrace and shame is made the symbol of our blessedness and redemption.

First, then, at the foot of the Cross, let us consider for a moment the character of sin. The subject is one that needs grave consideration. For it cannot be denied that many people now are apt to underrate the seriousness of this fact. Some years before his death Mr. Gladstone was asked what he considered the greatest change which had taken place during his lifetime in the religious condition of England, and he replied, "The decay of the sense of sin." A short while ago Sir Oliver Lodge published a book in which he recorded this judgment—"The higher man of to-day is not worrying about his sins at all, still less about their punishment. His mission, if he is good for anything, is to be up and doing." Now whatever may be the case with "the higher man of to-day"—for opinions may differ as to loftiness of character—the words not unfairly describe the attitude of the average man. The average, well-intentioned, moral man is not troubling about sin. He prides himself on cultivating a "religion of healthy-mindedness." The self-examining, the self-despising, the self-loathing of the saints he thinks foolish and old-fashioned. His

method is not to look in, but to look out; not to dwell upon the past, but to make ready for the future; not to linger in cypress groves of self-discipline and humiliation, but to aspire to the sun-lit heights of social service and utility. "Let your soul alone and think of the good of your neighbour," expresses the ruling principle of his religious life.

Now I do not presume to say that there are no elements of truth in the average man's ideal. Religion, I grant, is something infinitely more than a habit of depression, and being a Christian is not by any means synonymous with thinking oneself a very wicked person. There is no need to be morbid, or to exaggerate our faults, or to deem ourselves utterly vile and as bad as bad can be. Yet the light-hearted Gospel which deliberately ignores the black reality of sin is none the less false religion, just because it is false to the undeniable facts of life. Let us understand at least the condition of our humanity. Let us know what we actually are. Let us dare to find out what is wrong with us, and, finding that, call it by its proper name. And to the average man with his cheerful and shallow persuasions—so attractive at first sight, so inadequate when examined—let us venture to repeat the solemn warning of St. Anselm, "Thou has not considered what weight sin hath."

What, then, is the revelation of the Cross concerning sin? Well, in the first place, looking at sin as the occasion of the Cross, as the cause which brought it about and made it necessary, we learn

that sin is something which emphatically ought not to be. It cannot be, therefore, a part of us, that belongs to our God-given nature. It must be an intrusion into us, a violation of that nature. "Two things," writes Lancelot Andrewes—"two things I acknowledge in myself, O Lord; nature which Thou hast made, sin which I have added." Yes, nature and sin are two things and not one. And if this indeed be so—if sin be thus not natural, not in the line of our appointed tendency—then it follows that sin cannot be an element that is needed for our development. There is, you know, an opinion which is favoured by many to-day that sin is after all but a means of education, an ugly but useful instructor in the art of life, a guide which, by plunging us neck-deep into the slush and mire, leads us by force of reaction to the safety and cleanness of holiness. By our sins, it is claimed, we learn how to use aright our moral and spiritual faculties, just as children, by falling often, learn to walk. But observe how such theories are shattered on the single fact of the Cross. When once you come and contemplate the tragedy of Calvary, you cannot any longer gild and justify your sin. You cannot believe any more that evil is in the long run profitable experience, or that wrongfulness is nothing worse than righteousness in the making, or that vices are but stepping-stones to higher things. No, the Cross dashes down all the screens and excuses for sin. It shows us sin as something which should not, must not

be; as something which at any cost must be got rid of and abolished.

But now comes a further question. What is this something which ought not to be? What is this foulness introduced into a nature which was originally created fair and great and good? I think that there is not much difficulty in characterising sin. It is the attempt to live our life independently of God. It is estrangement from God, alienation from God, rejection of the thought of God, banishment of the love of God, non-attention to the claims of God. "Sin," says Martin Luther, "is essentially a departure from God." You see, then, that sin is a kind of apostasy. The sinner refuses to have anything to do with God. He refuses to submit himself to the supreme Authority. He says No to God's love and God's purpose for his life. And while he says No to God, he says Yes to the smiling, meretricious world that antagonises God. He believes in the world and listens to its voice and readily obeys it; and if amid the bustle and the business of the day he catches the accents of another Voice, he stops his ears and hurries on his path and has no time. And what the man believes in, that also does he love. He loves the world's pleasures and its satisfactions and its goods. He loves the world's callings and work. And he loves them, not as the Christian may lawfully do, in God and for the sake of God; but apart from God, as substitutes for God, and in God's place. "My sin was just this,"

writes St. Augustine in his *Confessions*, "that I sought for pleasures, grandeurs, realities, not in Him but in His creatures, myself and others."

Now mark the consequences of the sin I have described. Precisely inasmuch as sin is alienation from God, it is also a mortal injury to our own life and being. For man was made for fellowship with God, was meant to find his life, his moral self, his personality in Him. Hence sin, which severs the bond between the soul and God, destroys the connexion between the soul and life. It diverts from the soul the necessary stream of health. It deprives it of its nourishment. It cuts it off from the one thing in the universe that can make it strong and free. "Death itself," says a Father of the Church, "is not to love God." In the powerful story of a great French novelist, a man, who has made up his mind to do a terrible wrong, falls asleep and dreams. He fancies that he is visiting a beautiful village close to Paris, "where lovers go to pick lilacs in April." But now all the landscape is flowerless and ashen, and the sky overhead is of a leaden hue. An ominous silence broods over the place. The traveller walks through the streets and enters the houses, and he finds all the people standing silent; he questions them, but they answer not a word. In horror he flees, and the silent ones move after him, till at last on the dreary plain beneath that lowering heaven they salute him with a cry—"Do you not know that you have been dead a long while?" Yes,

brethren; "to be carnally-minded is death." The man who loses touch with God who is his life, destroys himself. He shrivels and pines and dwindles; becomes a ghost, a phantasm, the mere spectre of a man. I care not though the sinner may appear to be alive. I care not if he cut a brilliant figure in the world, if he be active in politics or prominent in society, a leader of culture or even a pillar of the church. I say that the man's life is fundamentally unreal. His activity and prosperity are a semblance and a sham. The man has departed from life; he has done murder on his soul; he has already committed suicide. And nothing remains but an emptiness and a terror and a mocking procession of unrealities that cry, "Do you not know that you have been dead a long while?"

Such, then, is sin—an estrangement from God which is also an estrangement from true life and being. Let us turn next to the problem of the deliverance from sin. What may we learn about this from the Master who teaches us as He dies upon the Cross?

Now at the present time, among those who are deeply conscious of the gravity of sin, and who have meditated deeply on the question of deliverance, but who yet for some reason hold back from the redemption of the Cross, there appear to be two parties. The first is the party of optimism. They tell us;—There is a deliverance and you can win it

for yourselves. Cultivate admiration for what is beautiful and excellent. Fix your eyes steadily on high ideals. Exercise your will and burst your hateful fetters. So shall you rise again from sin to righteousness, from the lingering death in self to the fulness of life in God. Well, I own that there is something very attractive about this programme. It is flattering to our dignity. It makes us feel strong and self-sufficient and independent; and we like to feel independent. But the question is not what we like, but what is possible; and the point which we have to decide is, Will this theory work? That is the crux of the matter—will it work? Think, brethren, of St. Augustine's ineffectual struggles before his great conversion. Think of Luther in the monastery, and the exceeding bitter cry, "My sin, my sin, my sin!" Consult your own experience. Has your disharmony ever brought forth harmony? Has the knowledge of what is excellent ever made you really good? Have you ever been able by mere exercise of will to achieve, not merely self-control in outward deeds, but a radical alteration of the principles of your nature, a transforming of the strongest, deepest passions of the heart? Nay, surely it is impossible. The theory will not work. We may hate the sin which is nevertheless so dear to us, we may long for release from it, we may seek to atone for it; but by our unaided efforts we shall never obtain deliverance.

And then again, as I said just now, there is another

party—the party of pessimism. The doctrine of this school is that there is no deliverance either from sin or from its consequences. The sinner is sold into a captivity of sin; and there is no escape, no offer of relief, no prospect whatever of reinstatement or forgiveness. That is the teaching of much of our finest literature. You find it, for example, in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, with its melancholy conclusion that "there's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for." Or you find it in such a novel as Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. "Hast thou found peace?" says the guilty minister Dimmesdale to the partner in his sin. "Hast thou?" she asks. "None," he answers—"nothing but despair!" Yes, that is what it comes to according to this teaching—"nothing but despair." We are broken and ruined and done for; and the only hope that is left us is the pagan hope of death, the "dreamless sleep," the blank annihilation, which may make a welcome end of self and sin together.

> "From too much love of living
> From hope and fear set free,
> We thank with brief thanksgiving
> Whatever gods may be
> That no life lives for ever;
> That dead men rise up never;
> That even the weariest river
> Winds somewhere safe to sea."

My brethren, from the optimism which misleads and the pessimism which overwhelms let us turn once again to the Cross, and ask what solution this

offers of the problem of deliverance. You remember how Bunyan's Christian, when he set out upon his pilgrimage, was troubled with a heavy burden. But he came in his journey to a little hill, on the top of which was a cross and at the bottom an open sepulchre. And as he reached the cross lo! the burden was suddenly loosed from off his shoulder, and went rolling down the hill, and fell into the sepulchre, and he saw it no more. What does it all mean? What is the significance, the true inwardness, of this parable of the heavy burden and the releasing cross?

Now I do not propose to defend any theory of the Atonement. As you probably are aware, a doctrine of the Atonement is neither precisely formulated in Holy Scripture nor defined with exactness by the universal Church. Christ's death, it has been felt, involves a mystery—something which goes beyond all illustrations and analogies, and of which all human explanations must of necessity be inadequate. Thus it is spoken of elusively, in figures and in metaphors. It is the Good Shepherd giving His life for the sheep. It is the Friend dying for His friends. It is the Son of Man offering Himself a ransom for you and me. This much, however, in the various representations, seems to stand out clear. Christ died in order to deliver us from sin—not merely, observe, to free us from the punishment of sin, not merely to avert the natural consequences of sin, but to abolish sin itself, to annul the estrange-

ment between ourselves and God, and with it the spiritual death which is its issue and result. Yes, somewhere in the Cross there is a marvellous saving efficacy; a real overcoming of evil, a real uprooting of wrong, a real relief, a real deliverance, a real restoration to freedom and life and righteousness and God.

So we are taught. But does this teaching tally with the facts of our experience? Just think of it a moment. We come to the Cross, and at the Cross we see revealed, as is nowhere else revealed, what God's love for us must be. Robert Browning once remarked in a private conversation, "The evidence of Divine power is everywhere about us; not so the evidence of Divine love." And the saying, perhaps, is true. We may not discern love's handiwork in the arrangements of the universe. Yet we cannot be mistaken as to the meaning of the Cross. Here, I repeat, we see what God's love is. We see what its reality is. We see what its capacity is. We see what it will do for us, what it has done in our case. "Herein is love," says St. John . . . "that He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." In one of the churches of Italy there is a very remarkable representation of the Crucifixion. Behind the Christ on the Cross there is sketched the dim figure of the eternal Father; the Father's hands are behind the hands of the Son, and the nails which pierce the Son are piercing the Father also. No doubt the design is crude, but the artist's idea is the right one—that God was in Christ, suffering

and travailing to reconcile us to Himself. In the visible sacrifice that was offered up on Calvary there was wonderfully working the Divine consummate love—not the mere royal clemency that issues from afar a pardon that costs nothing, not the immoral affection that smiles upon the sinner without troubling to ensure that his break with sin be certain, but the love which stoops down to us and suffers for our sakes, the love which endures the agony on our behalf, the love which does all to win us, which sinks to the deepest depth, which goes to the furthest limit, which makes the most awful sacrifice, which shrinks from no uttermost extreme of self-devotion, out of the horrors of crucifixion pleading with us for acceptance, crying to each, Come back to me, my child; "My son, give me thine heart." And it is just the assurance of this almost incredible love that becomes in our experience a real energy of salvation. It breaks the spell of sin. We cannot bear any more to be estranged from such a God, or to be identified with a world which opposes such a God. There is a great recoil from evil; a sudden awakening from the night of our corruption. We feel "the expulsive power of a higher affection"—the cleansing, purifying, regenerating power—and we can say with St. Augustine, "Thou didst cast out my sins by coming in Thyself, Thou greater Sweetness."

And this, my brethren, is the second half of the lesson that we learn about sin from the Cross. If

the Cross, on the one hand, shows us what sin is, with all the dreadful consequences of severance from God; it reveals to us, on the other hand, our rescue and deliverance. It tells us that we are sinners; but it tells us also that we are sons of God, and that our Father's love, incarnated in the Saviour, still goes to seek each lost one, and calls back every prodigal to his long-forgotten home. Let me summarise the teaching in the words of a German theologian. "There is only one terrible and fearful thing in the world, and that is sin; and there is only one thing precious and great; it is not the world and it is not of the world; it is the power of God, which becomes Lord over the sinner and sin."

Take away with you, then, this evening the great Gospel of the Cross, and let it arm you with might to win the victory over sin. I do not say, of course, that you will never fall again. You will often fall again. Often and often will you be conscious of new transgression. Often and often will you need a fresh forgiveness. The pathetic lines of Donne strike home to every heart with force—

> "Wilt Thou forgive that sin where I begun,
> Which was my sin though it were done before?
> Wilt Thou forgive that sin through which I run
> And do run still, though still I do deplore?
> When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done
> For I have more."

Yes, always more. And yet, if you will but take hold of the love that suffered on the Cross, if you will but consent that that love shall take hold of you, you will

never know the bitterness of the absolute estrangement. In spite of all your sin, you will still belong to God. In spite of all your sin, He will still belong to you. He will succour you from Calvary, He will give you grace to rise again and battle with your sin, He will strengthen you when failing, and He will lead you at the last to the blessedness of the victory when the rule of righteousness shall be made eternal and every wickedness shall be put away.

"From the confessionals I hear arise
Rehearsals of forgotten tragedies,
And lamentations from the crypts below;
And then a Voice Celestial that begins
With the pathetic words: 'Although your sins
As scarlet be,' and ends with 'as the snow.'"

VIII

THE LESSONS OF THE CROSS AND MODERN IDEAS

VIII

THE LESSONS OF THE CROSS AND MODERN IDEAS

II

THE LESSON OF SUFFERING

LAST evening I spoke to you on the lesson of the Cross concerning sin; to-night let me address you on the problem of suffering. This problem in the Western world—for I cannot here allude to Buddhism and the ancient pain-philosophies of the East—has in recent years been growing steadily in prominence. For the progress of civilisation, great and many as are its blessings, has undoubtedly had the effect, not only of increasing the actual amount of suffering, but also of intensifying our perception thereof and our susceptibility thereto. We know from our own experience that modern life is full of trouble. And modern art and literature, whose mission it is to hold the mirror up to life, relentlessly drive home the lesson. Suffering, we find, is the main theme of our drama, the chief interest of our fiction, the key-note alike of our poetry and philosophy. Even our history reads as a chronicle

of sorrows. One remembers the story of the great history of mankind, written in so many volumes, and summarised for a dying potentate in seven essential words—"They were born; they suffered; they died."

Here, then, is a problem which cries out for a solution. Suffering is a fact—an undeniable and tremendous fact. What are we to make of it? How are we to deal with it? What sort of attitude should we take up with regard to it? Well, the men of our day, whether consciously or unconsciously, are answering that question in a variety of ways. Some there are who are terrified by the fact, and try with all their might to shut their eyes to it and forget it. They confine their whole attention to the pleasant side of things. They banish all "glooms and sables," omit the negative propositions, and cover up everything ugly with agreeable ingenuities. By making believe that suffering does not exist they fancy that they will succeed in escaping it altogether. At the opposite pole to these are the prophets of passionate protest—men such as Maxim Gorky, who find the world an inferno, and rebel against furiously, assailing with savage vehemence the God and the society that make such misery possible. Others again in sullen silence acquiesce. Life, they believe with Schopenhauer, is a thoroughly bad bargain, "a business which does not pay its own expenses." But it is no use fighting against it. It is better to accept what cannot in any case be refused, to "live on and make no wry faces," and to steel oneself against trouble with what Bourget

has somewhere termed "the philosophy of disgust with the universal nothingness." And then there are yet others, though these are fewer in number, who endeavour to console themselves for the evil in the world by contemplation of its beauty. Life may be cruel, but it is still sublime. The darkness of the night does but enhance the festal splendours of the day, and pain itself contributes to "the glory of the sum of things." To such idealists all that is, is beautiful. Each cry is broken music. In every barren desert is an oasis of enchantment where bloom "the mystic flowers whose perfume lulls our sufferings to sleep."

Now I submit to you, my brethren, that none of these ways of approaching the fact of suffering can be considered satisfactory. It is frivolous and foolish to ignore this fact. It is futile to protest against it. It is weak and morally enervating to acquiesce in it as unmeaning. While to glorify the harshness and the terror of the world, to drape it in light and beauty, is to delude ourselves with chimæras and confound the distinctions between good and evil. We must dare to go down deeper if the problem is to be solved. We must penetrate the mystery in company with the Man of Sorrows, and wrest from it its secret by the power of the sorrowful Cross. "Enter," cries one of our English theologians, "enter the dim sanctuary of sorrow through the shadow of the Cross. Abide there, and as your eyes grow accustomed to the darkness, the strange lines upon its walls which seemed at first so

meaningless, will group themselves into shapes and forms of purposeful design."

What, then, I ask, do we learn about the fact of suffering from the Cross? Observe, I say nothing here about the origin of suffering. I do not raise the question why God in the beginning chose this particular means for working out His scheme. It may be that suffering exists because without it some great and precious good could not anyhow be achieved. Perhaps it was necessary as the only possible means to a consummate end, as the only possible instrument for the attainment of a blessedness cheaply purchased at the cost. But this is a mere suggestion. Whatever may be its reason, human suffering is a fact. I shall take this fact as given, and simply try to interpret its meaning by bringing it into relation with Christ's Passion and His Cross.

Now when we scrutinise our suffering in the presence of the Cross, the first thing, I think, that we learn about it is that much of it—far more perhaps than we commonly appreciate—is for our own good. It developes our powers. It educates our character. It gives depth to our life. It brings out all that is best in our human nature. Our Lord Himself, as you know, was not exempted from this discipline. As the writer of the Hebrews says, He was "made perfect through sufferings"; and again, "He learned obedience through the things which He suffered." This is,

indeed, the iron law of excellence. "No human being can be trained without blows," runs a line of Menander, which Goethe, who can hardly be called a friend of suffering, significantly places at the beginning of his autobiography. And elsewhere the apostle of culture reiterates the lesson.

> "Who ne'er his bread in sorrow ate,
> Who ne'er, the weary midnight hours,
> Weeping upon his bed hath sate,
> He knows you not, ye heavenly Powers."

Have you ever really considered, my brethren, have you ever sought to realise, how much you gain by suffering? Do you really understand that all the choicest blossoms in your little garden, all the most fragrant herbs, have their roots in a dark ground? Take any one you please. Take knowledge and wisdom and poetic fancy—are they not sprung from suffering? Are they not ever full of care and trouble? "Nothing is so ingenious as pain," proclaims the thinker. "The dear cross hath pressed many songs out of me," says the poet. Or again, take love. Think of the difference between the joyous, light affection of a little child, and the love that is stronger than death which fills the deep heart of a man. The one is the beautiful fruit of simple happiness and gladness; the other comes by suffering, by self-giving, by bearing alien burdens, by lavishing the treasure of one's own life on another. It is a very shallow, superficial love that knows not sorrow. Or take the moral character. What sort of men should we be if

we had never had experience of suffering's bitter discipline? What qualities would be ours, if we had never been tormented by a sense of our own shortcomings, if we had never borne the stress of the fierce battle with temptation, if we had never felt the agonies of yearning and aspiration, if we had never lived hard and struggled? How could our moral nature have gained stature and elevation? Surely he was right, profoundly right, who said that "without suffering is no man ennobled." And if you take religion you will find the same thing true. Our troubles and perplexities, our losses and disappointments—these tend to wean us from an unsatisfying world, and persuade us to seek a lasting happiness with God. When other comforts fail we learn to know the Comforter. So Milton, in his blindness, feels himself "brought nearer to the mercy and protection of the universal Father." So George Herbert sings:—

> "Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
> If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
> May toss him to My breast."

We see, then—do we not?—that much of what we suffer is for our own good. Our sorrows, very many of them, are angels that bring us benefits. Our pains are gains. We should be utterly lost without them. Is there one of you here who, if the chance were offered him in a tranquil moment, would consent to relinquish the gains in order to escape the pains? Would you part with your prerogative of reasoning and knowing, though it multiplies your troubles?

Would you sacrifice your love, because it costs you tears? Would you renounce your manly character, your virtue, your religion, because with each of these some woe, some sadness is entwined? Not one of you would do so. You would say, "Let suffering come; for suffering has its compensations. It enriches us. It betters us. It developes and refines. To suffer is worth while." Yes, brethren, it is worth while. "I would not give up," cries Wordsworth, "the mists which spiritualise our mountains for all the skies of Italy." I leave it to you to interpret the little parable.

Now turn again to the Cross and learn another lesson. If much of what we suffer is for our own good, Calvary surely teaches us that much more of what we suffer is for the good of others. The Son of Man, giving His life a ransom for many, exemplifies the truth that suffering has ends and uses which extend far beyond the sufferer's personal interests. There is such a thing as a vicarious experience. Men suffer instead of others. Some men grieve that others may be comforted; some men lose that others may be profited; some fall and die that others may rise and live. The greatest benefactors are the greatest sufferers. The martyr torn by the beasts in the midst of the arena, the patriot flinging himself on the points of the hostile spears, the doctor sacrificing a limb to science and philanthropy—these are the men that lead humanity's upward march. Their sufferings are

emancipating. Their pains are fraught with power. Their deaths mark epochs in the progress of mankind.

But note this further point. Sometimes men suffer for others deliberately and consciously, knowing what they are doing and doing it with a will. But it is not always so. Often they suffer for others without being made aware of it. They feel, indeed, the pain, but they cannot discern its purpose. They do not see that it is of use to anyone. They do not understand how it can lead to anything. They are puzzled by it, baffled by it; it appears to them unmeaning. And yet all the while, in some obscure unnoticed ways, they are benefiting others. Their suffering is vicarious. God, without consulting them or taking them into His secrets, is using their pain, and blessing it, and turning it to service. How often, for example, have the miseries and misfortunes of the victims of society been efficacious to arouse the torpid conscience of society, and thus in the end contributed to our social welfare! How often have the distresses caused by an earthquake or a pestilence stirred up to fresh resourcefulness the human mind, and purged by love and pity many a hard and selfish heart! How often has the illness of one member of a family been a softening, hallowing, humanising influence on the rest! Think, too, what a powerful element in the education of the race is the vision of brave sufferers. Charles Lamb with his pathetic devotion to his afflicted sister; Charles Darwin toiling so patiently for nearly forty

years with never one day of the health of ordinary men; Stevenson writing, "I have wakened sick and gone to bed weary, and I have done my work unflinchingly"; or William Ernest Henley, facing with splendid courage the utter ruin of all his hopes, and going down into the darkness with a smile upon his lips,

"and in my heart
Some late lark singing";

—should we not all be poorer without examples such as these? Would not our lives lack something, which we could ill afford to spare, if these men had been sleek and prosperous, and no cruel fate had come to test the fineness of their spirit? Nay, their sufferings are not wasted. Their pangs are fruitful in all natures that are true.

It is along these lines, my brethren, that I would explain not a few of our sufferings. May it not be that many of our griefs and sorrows, which bring no perceptible advantage to ourselves, are yet profitable for others? May it not be that just here, in the fire of the furnace, is our opportunity for service? That failure, that loss, that sickness, that terrible disappointment—who can tell what it portends? God sent it, perhaps, as a means through which we might best fulfil some ministry, as a means through which most effectually we might help our brethren on. Let us beware, then, that we do not selfishly cry out against our suffering. Let us remember its distant issues, its wide bearings on humanity; let us realise

all the extent of its beneficent possibilities, and then

> "if sorrow falls
> Take comfort still in deeming there may be
> A way to peace on earth by woes of ours."

It seems to me that the greater part of our suffering has by this time been accounted for. Much of it, we see, is the instrument of our own development, much of it the condition of some benefit to others. Yet I do not deny that there is something still left over—a remainder of suffering which our understanding cannot fathom. God only knows the secret of those overwhelming tragedies, in whose presence all words of comfort seem an impertinent offence, and every soothing argument is blunt and useless. Here, for example, is Edgar Allan Poe, watching his young wife dying of consumption. So poor is he that, though the weather is bitterly cold, he cannot provide even blankets for the miserable straw bed. He wraps the sufferer in his overcoat, and chafes her feet with his hands, and for warmth lays the tortoiseshell cat in her bosom. Or here again is Mozart. The musical world is ringing with the fame of his last opera, and flattering propositions come pouring in from eager managers. But it is all too late. The master dies, and dies in abject poverty. His wife cannot even raise money to pay for a coffin, so grudging charity provides the funeral. The driver of the hearse reviles the dead because he has received no drink-money. The body is carelessly shovelled into

an already occupied grave—a grave still unmarked and unknown, for it is the resting-place of a pauper. Who, I ask, can interpret such catastrophes as these? And yet, after all, they are not entirely exceptional. You have only to open the newspapers to find stories no less ghastly. Nay, perhaps, you need go no further than your personal experience. You yourselves know the season of agony when all "the stars have set below the horizon of the soul, and a night has descended which promises no morrow." You lie in the dust. You feel that all is over. You have come to pass without exit, to an enormous wall; your way of life is irretrievably cut off. You ask in stupefaction, Where is God? You cry in your great despair, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

My brethren, in such crises you can only do one thing—you can only cling fast to the consolation of the Cross. Was not that Cross to the disciples who beheld it, to the Mother who wept in its shadow, the most awful and incomprehensible and unredeemed of tragedies? Was there ever a failure comparable to this failure? Was there ever a sorrow that could be likened to this sorrow? Yet out of this failure sprang victory, and out of this sorrow came the perfect joy. Cling, then, cling through the darkness to this hope-inspiring Cross, and dare to believe in the morning which it predicts. Do not lose faith because your suffering seems inexplicable. See the Crucified before you. It is He who suffered most who blesses all the mourners, who promises peace to the troubled,

and to the heavy-laden rest. Put your confidence in His word, and someday you shall see that your sorrow, like His, was only the medium of an immeasurable mercy, and your sowing in tears but the pledge of the ultimate reaping in joy. "Ah! Lord God," cries Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, "when once we reach Thy holy hill, and can see all the way that we have come, will not our song of praise swell the loudest for those things which we cried the most bitterly to be delivered from on earth?"

What, then, to sum up in a word, do we learn about suffering from the great Sufferer on the Cross? Does it not seem as though our sufferings mean good —good for ourselves, or good for other people, or good in some sphere and direction which we cannot penetrate or realise? When we suffer, it is not because we have been cast away from God. Nay, our gloom, after all, is but

"shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly."

The kind hand all the while is reaching forth to bless, and we have no cause to be afraid. Then our attitude towards suffering, the right method of approaching suffering—what of that? Surely, if suffering be indeed designed for good, our duty in respect of it is clear and plain. We ought not simply to run away from it, or hate it, or protest against it; nor must we stoically submit to its attack, enduring it passively with set teeth and rebellious eyes. Rather should we

consecrate it, and neutralise all the bitterness of it, by availing ourselves of its benefits, and turning it to moral use. "Join with God," says Donne—"join with God, and make His visitations and afflictions as He intended them to be—mercies and comforts." Thus, when calamity falls upon us, may each of us learn to say—I will accept the gifts of suffering. I will cultivate its graces. I will gather its precious fruits. I will get all the profit I can from its stern and wholesome discipline. I will make the very best of it, and of myself by means of it. So far as in me lies, I will help it to perform, for me, for others, for the universe at large, its God-given service and mission. And above all, when things are darkest and I fail to see any light, I will trust my Guide and Father, who knows so much better than I do, and through every place of terror, every scene of desolation, still leads His pilgrims onward to the safety of their home.

"I bow myself beneath His hand;
That pain itself was wisely planned
I feel, and partly understand.

"I suffer with no vain pretence
Of triumph over flesh and sense,
Yet trust the grievous providence.

"How dark soe'er it seems, may tend
In ways I cannot comprehend
To some unguessed, benignant end."

IX

THE LESSONS OF THE CROSS AND MODERN IDEAS

IX

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III

THE LESSON OF SERVICE

IF there is one thing, my brethren, on which all Christians are agreed, it is that our Blessed Lord was alike the greatest Example and the greatest Teacher that the world has known of absolutely pure and disinterested service. Never was there one who devoted himself so entirely to the necessities of men. Never was there one who so emphatically inculcated the duty of such devotion. Christ's comfortable words and gracious deeds are a sublime revelation of supreme philanthropy. But the spirit of service which shines out so radiantly in all the details of His life, is displayed even more impressively in His passion and His death. At the Cross is unveiled its very essence and perfection. There we may learn what service really is; how long-suffering it is, how self-sacrificing it is; how lofty is its purpose, how illimitable its range, how invincible its energy for

the work it has to do. We cannot be too grateful for such a wonderful revelation. Let us try to understand it and to profit by it this evening. Let us learn the great lesson of service from the Redeemer and the Cross.

What, then, are the principal elements in our Lord's ideal of service? Men sometimes speak of service as a simple affair of the will—as the right exercise of our will in our dealings with our fellows. And that, no doubt, it is; yet service means more than that. For you cannot isolate a single faculty, or split, as it were, into fragments a nature whose tissue is one. Sever the will from the feeling and the thought that have created and sustained it, and it very soon comes to the end of its resources. Yes; to will aright towards men you must also feel aright towards them, and to feel aright towards men you must also think aright about them. It is simply impossible to will and work for men as Jesus did, unless you feel towards men what Jesus felt, and judge about men as Jesus judged. Here, then, we get three things which belong to the essence of all Christian service. First, there must be the Christian estimate of men. Secondly, there must be the Christian sentiment towards men. And last, corresponding with these, there must be the Christian will, that utters itself in sacrificial deeds for men's advantage.

Let us start with the first, and inquire by the light of the Cross, What is the Christian view, the Christian estimate of men? That question, I take it, is an easy one to answer. For surely the Cross reveals, as

nothing else reveals, man's incalculable worth. Christ died for us—what more could we say than this? Could there possibly be a more convincing demonstration of the infinite value of that which was redeemed at such a cost? So precious was man in the sight of the Son of God, that He was willing, in form of man, to suffer the vulgar doom of a vulgar malefactor for his sake! And it was man—you should notice—the human being as such, for whom Jesus tasted death. He valued man for himself; not for the country where he happened to belong, not for his position, or condition or ability; but just for his humanity—that "miracle of miracles"—for the image of God in which he has been made. He recognised even in the worst a wandering child of His Father. He discerned in the very meanest potentialities of soul. He saw the treasure in the earthen vessel, the vein of goodness in the corrupted character, the glimmer of truth in the darkness of folly and error, the life still struggling even in the grip of death. He knew that there was something great, something golden and rare and beautiful in man, and He held it very sacred, and retained His reverence for it to the last.

Now in the present day, my brethren, we talk a great deal about the dignity of humanity; yet the genuine Christian estimate of human nature is not, perhaps, so general as we like to think. Many causes are contributing to obscure and falsify our view. Science, with its disclosure of the immensities and eternities, degrades man in the scale of being. It

shatters his cherished fancy that he is the centre of the universe, and shows him to himself as but a microscopic speck on the face of a single petal of the gigantic flower of the worlds. "Man is diminished in his own eyes. That," says a recent writer, "is the great negative result of scientific development." Literature, again, with its bias towards realism, its unsparing analysis of motive and character, its deliberate exposure of the brute in human nature—literature, I say, presses home the conclusions of science. In the books of the day man is dwarfed from those grand proportions which authors extolled and magnified half a century ago. So too the increased publicity of modern life, the opening of the abysses of our civilised society, is a force in the same direction. There was, I believe, a time when you might wander at will through the streets in the West of London, and see little or nothing of the squalor and degradation that hid away shamefacedly in the dens of the Eastern city. But now that time is passed. Humanity in its least noble, in its least attractive aspect, is paraded before your eyes. The men who have gone under, the women who have abandoned the last shreds of self-respect, the children who can scarcely be distinguished from the animals—you meet them everywhere; marching in drear processions through Oxford Street and Piccadilly, shaking and shivering in the chill March wind that sweeps Trafalgar Square, loitering round the doors of the theatres and restaurants, or watching the yellow river from the parapet of the Embankment, or

lying in huddled heaps in the sheltered corners of the Park. This huge army of the wretched may—nay, must—excite your pity; but as it streams across the scenes of your luxurious existence, you feel—do you not?—less hopeful about humanity, less confident of its qualities, less sure of its significance, than you used to be before. The old estimates are shaken. You find it hard to measure men with the measurements of the Cross. Yes, the saying of Dr. Channing has not lost its force. "The worth of a human being," he emphatically declared, "is still a mystery hidden from an immense majority, and the most enlightened of us have not looked beneath the surface of this great truth."

But mark this, brethren. If we are really to serve and bless and benefit mankind, we must learn first of all to estimate them as our Lord did on the Cross. Right judgment of men is the necessary condition of right service of men. We cannot make mighty sacrifices for what is of no value. We cannot be active to help where nothing is gained by our succour. We cannot go out to save, unless we be assured that there is indeed a life to save. It is only belief in a life so wonderfully precious amid its utmost degradation that the Son of God could agonise and die on its behalf—it is only unswerving belief in precisely such a life that can fire our hearts, and nerve our wills, and strengthen our hands for rescue. Let the estimate of the Cross, then, be the foundation of our philanthropy. "Let us pray," as Mrs. Browning writes,

"God's grace to keep God's image in repute."

To believe in human nature; to recognise, in Lowell's phrase,

> "the nobleness that lies
> In other men, sleeping but never dead";

to be clear that (as Emerson puts it) "there is an infinite worthiness in man which will appear at the call of worth"—this is the first essential of all Christian service.

Pass now to the second element in service. Corresponding with the Christian view, the Christian estimate of men, there must be the Christian sentiment, the Christian state of feeling, with regard to them. And what can this be, my brethren, but Christ-imitating love? Turn back once more to Calvary and contemplate the Cross. It stands there through the ages as the monument of love—the symbol of love's service, of love's sacrifice, of love's triumph. To those who can read it presents a twofold legend. On the face of it is written, "Greater love hath no man than this." And behind is the inscription, "A new commandment I give unto you . . . as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."

Right feeling, right emotion, love—this is the second factor in the Christian's service. "He doeth much," À Kempis says, "who loveth much." Love is the great dynamic, the great driving force of service. Not only does it inspire in us the heroism of endeavour, but it carries us on victoriously through all discourage-

ments and difficulties. Other motives of service are apt to give way when sorely tried. The intellectual conviction of the solidarity of humanity, the cool philosophic benevolence, the moral will for justice, the sentimental, half-selfish pity that sheds tears over men's misfortunes—not one of them can be depended on in the hour of abnormal strain. But love stands every shock. It is prepared for any contest. It is equal to all emergencies. When the task we have undertaken seems too hard, when the people whom we toil for seem ungrateful and unworthy, when the good cause does not prosper, when obstacles and hindrances accumulate without, and our purposes and enthusiasms wax faint and weak within—then love, and love alone, can still secure for us the victory. "Love," says À Kempis again—"love feels no burden, thinks nothing of trouble, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility; for it thinks all things lawful for itself and all things possible." "We must be lovers," writes Emerson, "and at once the impossible becomes possible. . . . Let our affection flow out to our fellows; it would operate in a day the greatest of all revolutions."

And is there not here, my brethren, another lesson for our age? To serve, in the highest sense, is to draw near to men in love. But how often do we seem the very contrary of loving! We cannot forget the dark pictures that have been drawn of the condition of modern society. The English statesman of

the nineteenth century, speaking out of the fulness of a long and varied experience, has characterised the world as "a motley, sparkling multitude, in which you may mark all forms and colours, and listen to all sentiments and opinions, but where all you see and hear has only one object—plunder." The Russian novelist, writing only the other day, gives the following description: "Everyone lives for himself. Everyone wishes the best for himself. . . . Everyone is striving to attain to the highest place in life—one in one way, another in another way—but all of necessity desire that they may be visible from a distance, like the belfries." Then a voice from France chimes in. "Perhaps it is only human nature," it cries, "to inflict suffering on anything that will endure suffering." You will tell me, no doubt, that all such estimates are exaggerated, and I agree that it is so. But look at modern society as optimistically as you can, view its best features in the most rosy light—have you not still a certain sense of something wanting? Philanthropies abound. Associations are being formed for all kinds of deserving objects. Services are being rendered. Much good is being done. And yet—and yet—we are conscious of something wanting; something the lack of which just hinders our effort from arriving at its mark, just hinders our work from telling for men's happiness and advantage, just hinders our very successes from being full and complete and satisfying. My brethren, we lack love. We honestly try to serve, yet our service is untouched by any

grace and glow of sentiment. Our benevolence is mechanical—

> "Organised charity, scrimped and iced,
> In the name of a cautious, statistical Christ."

We give everything but our hearts. We spend our time and strength, we labour conscientiously; but we lack the sweet temper of service which alone brings forth fruit to perfection.

Here again, then, let us listen to our Master of the Cross. It is He who reveals the necessity of love for all great and permanent service. And it is He, let me add—it is none but He, who makes the love which is needed possible. Sometimes, you know, men say: We cannot force ourselves to love. We cannot by act of will constrain our inclinations. If already we love—why, there is an end of the matter; but if we love not, then nothing can make us love. It is surely a case, say they, where Goethe's words apply, "Unless ye feel it, ye shall ne'er attain it." But the solution of this difficulty, like the solution of so many others, may be found at the foot of the Cross. For the Cross becomes the power and possibility of love, since it makes us feel and know the love which Jesus has for us. That knowledge inflames. It quickens and inspires. It generates in our hearts an amazing energy of affection. A French writer, who had experienced a great happiness from God, has recorded its effects on his feelings towards others. "Suddenly," he says, "I loved all better than before, young and old, happy

and miserable, whosoever went my way in the street. . . . And as I strode about this great Paris in all directions, every man I met seemed a brave fellow." And similar, I take it, are the effects which are produced when we fall beneath the influence that radiates from the Cross. Once let us thoroughly realise Christ's "great tenderness" for us, and the love-power hitherto dormant in our nature will be wakened. We too at last shall love. For the sake of Christ's love to us, we shall warm to our fellow-men. We shall love them because He who loves us so loves them; because He bids us show our grateful love to Him by loving them; because He condescends to identify Himself with them; because He says, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these My brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me."

Then, lastly, we come to the third element in service—the will to serve. When the intellect is enlightened as to the worth of men, when the heart is inspired to love them, then the will must be moved to operate for their advantage.

My time is nearly run out, so I shall not say much on this. But there is just one point to which I desire to call attention. The will to serve, when it is perfect and matured, reveals itself invariably as the will to suffer—the will to give oneself, the will to surrender oneself for others' sake. Real service of necessity involves real sacrifice, and there can be no real service where there is no real sacrifice. The love which

redeems and blesses always hangs upon the cross. Do you remember how at Golgotha the Jews reviled our Lord? "He saved others," they scoffed; "himself he cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross that we may see and believe." 'Twas a blasphemy, no doubt; and yet there is surely a sense in which the words were true. Himself He could not save. Two courses of action, and two courses alone, were open to our Lord. It was possible to save Himself, to reject the Father's cup, to refuse the Cross with all its shame, its physical pain, its mental agony. Or again, it was possible to save others. But both at once it was not possible to do. Christ had to choose between two sharp alternatives. He had to take one or other. In deciding for the one He was necessarily obliged to decide against the other. He could not have both. And knowing well the issues, Jesus made His solemn choice. He willed to become the Redeemer of the world, and thereby, as Pascal puts it, He "took the way of perishing according to human calculations." Others He saved; Himself He would not and He could not save.

"It is the abnegation of self," Whyte Melville writes, "which has wrought out all that is noble, all that is good, all that is useful, nearly all that is ornamental in the world." And it seems to me that one reason of the comparative failure of much of our philanthropy is our neglect or misapprehension of this important truth. Men will not understand that "for great effects and great works a proportionate

self-dedication is necessary." They are constantly attempting to accomplish the impossible. They try to save others and themselves at the same time. They want to be useful without being made uncomfortable. They search for some mode of service which is not a mode of sacrifice, for some means to a public gain which shall involve no private loss. So they temporise here, and make compromises there; relieving the suffering through the agency of societies, ministering to the poor by means of annual subscriptions, giving dances in aid of the down-trodden, and furthering works of rescue by attending charitable dinners. Is it any wonder that their efforts are ineffectual? No great things can be achieved till men are willing to pay the cost. Dean Church has said: "What conquers must have those who devote themselves to it; who prefer it to all other things; who are proud to suffer for it; who can bear anything so that it goes forward." And Bishop Westcott writes: "The voice of humanity itself declares, as the lesson of the ages, that sacrifice alone is fruitful."

My brethren, shall we not learn this last great lesson of the Cross? Shall we not fix once for all within our minds this Christ-given truth that the first step in all beneficent and really helpful work is self-renunciation? There is no duty that should be done, no service that should be rendered, no useful purpose that should be followed up, which has not somewhere in it a Gethsemane and a Calvary. The call to service always is a call to give yourselves. Perhaps

you are called to give your brains for others and think for them. Perhaps you are called to give your experience for others and act for them. Perhaps you are called to give your time or money for others and spend for them. It may be that you are called to give your life for others and die for them. But in whatever direction you are summoned to go and serve, you may hold it as certain that your service will mean a cross. And it is precisely in the measure that you are willing self-forgetfully to accept that cross, that the victory over evil in your particular province will be lost or won. Take the idea, then; take the crucial principle. Before you the heroes of the past, the benefactors and philanthropists, move on beneath their crosses, saving by their sufferings, quickening by their deaths; and at the head of all, and bearing the greatest cross of all, is He whose immeasurable sacrifice is the world's salvation, by whose grief our sins and sorrows have been carried away, by whose stripes we all are healed. Will you refuse to follow where the King and His great ones lead?

"Follow Me, Jesus said, and they uprose,
Peter and Andrew rose and followed Him,
Followed Him, even to Heaven, through death most grim
And through a long hard life without repose,
Save in the grand ideal of its close.
Take up your cross and follow Me, He said,
And the world answers still through all its dead,
And still would answer had we faith like those."

The right estimate of men, the right feeling towards men, the right will to act for men—these, we have

seen, are the elements of Christian service. And I ask you, when you return to your homes to-night, to meditate for a little while upon this teaching of the Cross. We have still much to learn and much to do. Our service is not what it should be. The Kingdom tarries, and the world in its sin and suffering still waits for "the revealing of the sons of God." And yet even now, in spite of our shortcomings, there are signs of the dawning of a better future. The dignity of humanity, the worth and power of love, the fruitfulness of sacrifice, are being ever more appreciated; the Spirit of the Crucified, in ways unknown before, is finding entrance to our hearts. There is reason for hope, for surely—

> "We discern through the dark,
> Eastward, not now very far,
> A song too loud for a lark,
> A light too strong for a star."

X

CHRIST'S DOCTRINE OF GOD

"When ye pray, say, Father." -S. Luke xi. 2 (R.V.).

X

CHRIST'S DOCTRINE OF GOD

IT has justly been said that the strongest of practical forces in the life of man is his idea of God. Whatever his notion of God may chance to be, it will certainly colour the whole of his beliefs, and through his beliefs, determine his conduct and shape his character. Hence what we think about God affects not only our dogmatic formulas and devotional utterances; it affects our daily work and daily play, our social relations and our domestic relations, our sentiments and talk and habits and general way of living. And thus it is simply of vital importance that this idea of God, which has such far-reaching results, should be a right idea. When the root is sound, sound too will be the branches. But if the deepest principle of the life be vicious, how can we possibly hope that the thoughts and words and acts, which spring from it, can ever be really strong and fair and true?

Now the highest conception that the mind can receive of God has been given us once for all by Jesus Christ. Of this, at any rate, there can be no dispute. There are many things connected with the work of

our Blessed Lord which are subjects of heated controversy. But on this one point all the parties are agreed—that Christ is supremely the Interpreter of God. He is the God-Revealer. He has made God known as He could not otherwise be known. He has expounded the truth of Deity. And those who even now would penetrate the great mystery, and face the inscrutable Being who makes claim on their heart and homage, must pilgrim in spirit to the sacred hills of Galilee, and sit as attentive learners at the feet of Jesus.

Father! "This little word," says Luther, "conceived effectually in the heart, passeth the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and the most eloquent rhetoricians that ever were in the world." Father! God is the Father, first and uniquely of our Lord Himself, and then in general of all human spirits. That is our Lord's exegesis of the Deity. Here, in two syllables, is the summary of His theology. All through His life, at every period of it—through storm and sunshine, in sorrow and in joy, at the bright beginning as at the bitter end—Christ clung with unswerving confidence to this central truth, that God is Father. You have only to recall the familiar passages of the Gospels. What is the first recorded saying of the Boy? "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" What is the last expiring utterance of the Man? "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." What is the word which again and again rings so musically in the sentences of the

Preacher on the Mount? It is still "Father." And when the Master teaches His disciples how to approach the Infinite, what is the beautiful name that He sets within their lips? "Say, Father." Well is it observed by one of our leading theologians—"If every religion has a prayer, or better, *is* a prayer, the religion of Jesus Christ is the religion of the paternity of God."

Now this idea of God was something new. And in saying this, I do not mean, of course, that the mere terminology was new. Among the Jews, and also among the Gentiles—in India and Babylonia, in Egypt and Greece and Rome—that gracious name of Father was already heard. "Like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear Him," sings the Israelitish psalmist. "O vast and distant Heaven who may be called our Father," is the language of a Chinese ode more ancient than Confucius. "Be easy of access to us, as a father to his son," runs the first hymn of the Rig-Veda; and Buddha's dying words were, "Thou art our Father, and wilt take us to the other shore of this ignorance." So too in the third century before Christ the Stoic Cleanthes prayed: "Draw men out from the gloom of their ignorance, scatter the darkness of their souls, O Father." Our Lord, it is evident, did not Himself invent this name for God. He did not coin the title. He was not the first, any more than He was the last, to look up into the arch of heaven and whisper "Father." And yet, though the word He used was

very old, our Lord applied it in a manner and with an emphasis that was astonishingly new. For hitherto the Fatherhood of God had been recognised merely as one aspect of God's character, as one quality among other qualities, as one attribute among other attributes. God was King, and God was Shepherd, and God was Lawgiver, and God was Judge, and God was also Father. But our Lord presents the Fatherhood as the whole character of God. This is His very nature. This is His spirit, His essence, the true perfection of His Being. "With Jesus," it has been said, "God and Father were identical." Fatherhood, in other words, was to Him not a side of Deity, but the centre. "God might be King and Judge: He was first of all, and last of all, and through all, Father."

What, then, exactly does Christ mean by "Father"? There can be no finer commentary, I think, than the sentence of St. John—"God is Love." The revelation of Jesus is the revelation of Love's omnipotence. He tells us that the infinite and eternal God is Love; that the motive of all His action is Love; that the method of all His providence is Love; that the end of all His purposes is simply Love. Love is, in fact, the real essence of God—Love creating, Love protecting, Love educating, forgiving, seeking, saving, drawing to Itself. "God is Love." And to illustrate and interpret for us this magnificent conception, Christ takes the most pure and exquisite type of human affection, and employs it as the symbol of the transcendent Goodness. We all of us know what the love of an

earthly parent is. We know the wealth of it, the wonderful strength of it. We know its sympathy, its sacrifice, its delicacy, its permanence. And now the great Teacher comes, and He takes up this love of our human experience, and multiplies it and magnifies it and exalts it to infinity, and then, as it were, He says to us, "All this is but a hint, a faint suggestion, of the Love which is the life and centre and soul and very self of God."

So God is Father because God is Love. But if this idea of God be really true, then it certainly ought to be regulative of all that we think or say or know about the Deity. All must be measured by the standard of absolute Love. For instance, if ever we meet with any statement about God which is plainly inconsistent with the conception of the Fatherhood, we may be certain that that statement is either in part or wholly false. Or if ever we notice anything in God's providence which perplexes us, we must turn to the Fatherhood for help in our perplexity. Or if any accepted doctrine of God appear doubtful or ambiguous, the Fatherhood must determine its right scope and meaning. This, I say, in all difficulties, must be the regulative idea—that whatever God may be and however He may operate, He is always above all Father, always above all perfect Grace and Love.

Then let us apply this conception for a moment, and see what light may be cast on some of God's relations with His human family. Take, for example,

the doctrine of God's Sovereignty. We are, perhaps, most accustomed to think of God as King. Even the untutored instinct tells us that "Jehovah reigns," and the cultivated reason does but confirm the lesson. Before that royalty, so high and glorious, the creature needs must bow. Our Lord Himself, with all His lovely teaching about the tenderness of the Father, speaks hardly less emphatically of His awe-inspiring majesty. Is not that Father "Lord of heaven and earth"? Is not Jerusalem called "the city of the great King"? Are not men over and over again described as servants and as subjects? God is indeed the King of kings and Lord of lords. And yet, my brethren, we shall fall into grievous error if we seek to interpret God by means of political analogies. No hard state-system, no autocracy or monarchy, can adequately illustrate the loving government of the Almighty. These metaphors will not do. I am sure, indeed, that many a one is positively kept away from God, just because he persists in measuring Him by the crude, political standard. He thinks of God habitually as a cold, official personage; and how can we wonder that his heart does not go out to Him? The wonder would be, if with such a narrow view, he could have brought himself to love Him. It is said that even good Bishop Butler on his death-bed expressed great awe at the thought of appearing soon before the Moral Governor of the universe. But then his chaplain spoke to him of the Father's boundless love and the Blood of the Son that was

shed. "Ah, that is comfortable," sighed the dying bishop.

Let us leave, then, the terms of politics to politicians, and seek the true clue to God in the experience of the household. To understand what kingship really means, we should turn our attention to its original in the family. It is the father here that reigns. It is kindness here that governs. The rule from beginning to end is a rule of love. Behind the external functions of administration and authority is the parental care, that orders everything for the children's good. And it is here, our Lord informs us —not in the political but in the domestic sphere— that we must look for the type and emblem of the heavenly sovereignty. God is the King just because He is the Father. His crown is simple goodness; His sceptre the wisdom of love. *Dominus regit me,* runs the Vulgate translation of the twenty-third Psalm—"The Lord doth rule me, therefore can I lack nothing." Here is the secret of the perfect Kingship. At the heart of it, in the depths of it, beneath the grandeur and the majesty, is the watching, caring, all-providing, ever-yearning Fatherhood.

Or again, in the light of our Lord's conception of the Father-Love, consider the truth of the Divine Severity. The theologians of a certain school have insisted, perhaps, in too unmeasured terms on the consuming anger of an outraged Deity. Yet surely the crushing sense of the resentment of the Holy One is a fact, and a very familiar fact, of our sinful

consciousness. "Thine indignation lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast vexed me with all Thy storms. . . . Thy wrathful displeasure goeth over me, and the fear of Thee hath undone me." Cries John Bunyan in his agony: "O the unthought-of imaginations, frights, fears, and terrors, that are effected through a thorough application of guilt!" "Methought," he adds, "I saw as if the sun which shineth in the heavens did grudge to give light, as if the very stones in the street and the tiles upon the houses did bend themselves against me." Truly the righteous anger of a righteous God is no mere fancy or fanatical delusion. It is a very authentic reality. It is a thing of most certain experience. It is an awful truth of Scripture, stamped with the high authority of our Lord Himself. "I will tell you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him."

Yet still the question comes to us—By what analogy, by what earthly type or image, should God's sternness be interpreted? Are we to view His dealings through the medium of the law courts? Are we to seek for a commentary in the criminal code? The magistrate who sentences a prisoner at the bar—is this indeed the most accurate representation of our all-holy Judge? Not so, my brethren. Here once again, it seems to me, Christ beckons us to the family, and bids us learn the lesson, not of the law courts, but of the home. And do we not know that in this sphere love, if it be worthy of the name of love, must

often act severely? It cannot disregard the moral welfare of the loved one. It cannot permit the darling of its soul to perish in his sin. The one thing that a noble father simply cannot do is to acquiesce impassively in the ruin of a child. At any cost, by any method—if need arise, by threats and pains and penalties and punishments—love must reclaim the wanderer; yes, even though the means employed shall break its heart, it must bring the lost one home. And does not this sternly kind parental love illumine wonderfully the Divine severity? Our heavenly Father, like the earthly one, at times seems cruel. Yet His harshness is but the outflow of consummate Goodness, resolved by any and by every means, to rescue the fallen soul. To seek, to save, to find, to cure—that is the final purpose of God's stringent measures; and all His treatment of us, even the most severe, is ultimately directed to this grand result. Thus even in wrath and punishment love strives with us and triumphs. "I saw," writes George Fox in his mystical style, "that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that I saw the infinite love of God."

Or once again and lastly, apply our Lord's conception of the Father-Love to the mystery of God's Providence. It is hard, I think, for anyone who has not learned from Jesus to see Divine Love reigning at the heart of things. The facts which fall beneath the unenlightened observation seem often to suggest a

widely different inference. When we go out into the world and mark what takes place around us, we find on every side perplexity and trouble. "Human life," it has been said, "is but a Rembrandt kind of picture at the best." The laws of Nature work, remorseless and indifferent. The voices of suffering men proclaim an endless tale of woes. There is pain; there is loss; there is crime; there is death; there is, worse than death, despair. And where in all this, we ask, is evidence for a Parent-God? Where are the traces of the providential care that guards the great and keeps the little ones, and disposes all untoward events and circumstances for their good?

Yet Jesus Christ was no mere shallow optimist. He knew by experience how much there is in the world which seems to contradict the loving Providence of God. Was not His own life governed by a Power, whose ways were strange, mysterious, terrible? You remember the bright beginning of His ministry; and then the waning hope, the disappointment upon disappointment, the dread foreboding which grew gradually into certainty of impending doom, the bitter cup approaching ever nearer, and, last of all, the lonely agony of the Garden, the awful tragedy of the Cross. Surely our Lord in His Manhood felt, as never the most troubled of men has felt, that God's directing Providence is hard to recognise, and the manner of His working is past finding out. And yet He never for an instant doubted. "The cup which my Father hath given me," He said, "shall I not

drink it?" God might conceal Himself, but He was still the Father. Behind the mask of cruelty and indifference smiled the eternal Love.

And if we are in truth the disciples of Jesus, we have no alternative but to accept our Master's view. We cannot, by our own unaided wisdom, judge of things. We know very little of ourselves or of the universe. In times past there is evil which we cannot understand; in times present there is evil which we cannot solve. We are but groping dimly in the twilight; not a man of us can see clear. But amid the uncertainties of our finite reason we still can trust our Father. Still we can believe, as Jesus once believed, that all the last issues are in the hand of One who is working, by means we know not, the true welfare of His children; who through conflicts and trials, through fierce assaults and bitter agonies, is guiding their steps, and holding them safe, and leading them home.

> "Not any power the universe can know
> Can touch the spirit hid with Christ in God.
> For naught that He has made, above, below,
> Can part us from His love."

Yes, as Carlyle says: "The universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but godlike and my Father's."

In conclusion, my brethren, let me earnestly commend to you Christ's doctrine of God, our Father. This conception of God is the highest and the purest

that has been ever, or can be ever, set before the mind of man. It comprehends all other ideas of God. It deepens and fulfils all others. It harmonises and explains all others. It is itself subordinate to no other. It is final, perfect, absolute. Thought can never transcend this grand conception. Imagination, fired by the divinest inspiration, can figure naught more beautiful. The intellect which seeks the true, the conscience which seeks the good, the affection which seeks the unblemished ideal as an object of love—all these herewith are satisfied. Further than this we would not and we could not go. For Fatherhood is the very crown of God's self-revelation, and the last word of theology is that "God is Love."

Take, then, this thought with you into your daily life. Learn more and more to know your God as Father. Learn to trace out His goodness in the world of nature round you, in the flowers which star the fields, in the sparrow that flutters and falls, in the shimmer of the sunlight and the soft descent of rain. Read of it often in those wonderful Gospel stories, of the shepherd who goes to seek the straying lamb, and the father who spies the prodigal a great way off, and runs to meet him with such overpowering joy. Study it further in the compassion of the Saviour, in His care for the sick and sin-stained, remembering how He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." And lastly, in the sphere of your own personal experience, mark well the continual working of that Father-Love, which pardons all your sins,

which soothes your every sorrow, which helps you to carry your cross, be it never so weighty, which fills you with comfort and tranquillity and peace. So, consciously enfolded in the bosom of the Infinite, you need fear no evil. The ghosts and shades of night-time fade and pass. But ever in the East the morning brightens, heralding the glories of the perfect day.

XI

RELIGION AND ROMANCE

"He went out, not knowing whither he went."—Heb. xi. 8.

XI

RELIGION AND ROMANCE

THERE are in the New Testament few passages finer than the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. It is the psalm or anthem of triumphant faith. The anonymous author celebrates the grace of reliance on good things hoped for but invisible; and in powerful, rhythmical sentences commemorates the long succession of heroic men who, inspired by such hope and trust, assayed adventure down the great ways of the world. Among the foremost is the faithful Abraham. "By faith"—so runs the record—"Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Let me present to you this morning this strangely impressive figure of the father of the faithful as a sort of type or embodiment of that spirit of high romance which seems to be characteristic of all true religion. For religion—at any rate in its more developed forms—has always a romantic element. It is not the mere holding of a set of beliefs. It is not the performing of a series of rites. It is not even the living in accordance with moral laws. It is spiritual adventure; the

soul's excursion into the mysterious infinite; a pressing onwards and onwards into worlds not realised. Always before it lies a great and wonderful quest. "I have been after an adventure all my life," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson, "a pure, dispassionate adventure, such as befell early and heroic voyagers." And the words may fitly summarise the lives of all the Saints. They were after an adventure. Sometime to each there came a call of the Eternal. They heard it, and obeyed. They went out, nothing doubting. They went out, not knowing whither they went.

Our own religion especially, the religion of Jesus Christ, is brimful of such romance. It was to the poetical side of man—to the feelings, to the imagination, to the chivalrous emotions—that our Lord most loved to appeal. He did not address Himself primarily to the intellect, nor did He propose to convert the world by syllogism. His method was rather to stir up an ardour for excellent things, to kindle a passion of interest which should mightily catch men away towards great visions and great tasks. Thus He came to men romantically as a Leader and a King. "Follow," He said. "Come and follow Me. Take up your cross and follow." How inspiring is the call! It suggests the open way, the setting forward to a goal, the floating banner. "Follow," Christ says. Do you see how He thrills us with the spirit of adventure? Do you see how He lures us on to daring enterprise? Irresistibly He summons us—summons us to take the road of which a modern writer speaks, "which leads

to the light on the far horizon, and beyond to the presence of God."

Now I would emphasise to-day this romantic quality of religion, because it seems to me in some danger of being forgotten. The piety of our time has lost in a measure the old magical glamour. It has grown a little dull and matter-of-fact and ordinary. Somehow or other it lacks buoyancy and passion. We do not, of course, like the frigid philosophers of the eighteenth century, sneer openly at enthusiasm as a dangerous absurdity. We are very far from sympathising with an author such as Shaftesbury, who condemns it as a distemper almost as bad as the smallpox. Yet if we no longer ridicule enthusiasm in religion, we are curiously afraid of it. We shrink from being carried away, shrink from being mastered by the heavenly impulse, shrink from the unknown perils into which that impulse leads. Do you remember the address of Tennyson's Ulysses to his mariners? "Push off," he cries:—

> "And sitting well in order, smite
> The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
> To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
> Of all the western stars, until I die."

But for us the gold and azure of the sunset realm have scant attraction. It is wiser, we think, to stand secure on solid earth, and bid a long farewell to the islands of the blessed and every home of dreams. Thus the mystery and the glory and the poetry of romance seem gradually to be passing from our twentieth-

century religion. No longer do we picture ourselves as the paladins of Christ; we are simply decent citizens who decorously acknowledge our obligations to the Deity and pay our respects to Him as a matter of course. Instead of the fire of faith we have cold, reasonable conclusions; instead of the madness of self-sacrificing devotion we have amiable manners and unexceptionable morals; instead of the gates of the City of God we have a service and a sermon once or twice a week.

But mark this, brethren. It is just because the forces of mere rationalism and unillumined common sense are so vigorous to-day, it is just because the world is so much with us, with its absorbing fears and cares, while heaven appears to us so vague and dim, that we have urgent need to learn again this truth—that religion is romance, that religion is adventure, that religion is the eagerness of soul that seeks for God. It is such religion alone, such sacred, undying romance, that can avail to quicken the pulse and stir the heart of modern society. It is the zeal of the explorers, of the adventurers for God; of the men who heard a voice and saw a beckoning, who went out upon a journey, who went out faithful and hopeful, who went out not knowing whither they went.

Look now a little more closely at religion in its romantic aspect. And consider it first as the great intellectual adventure, the experiment of the mind, the pursuit of the Vision Splendid amid the forms

and phases of transitory things. Genius, as you may know, has been spoken of by Frederic Myers as "a kind of exalted but undeveloped clairvoyance." But religion is also a kind of clairvoyance. It is the divination of God. In the centre of the temporal it would probe to the Eternal. Behind the earthly shadows it would move towards the Light in the rays of which the universe shall be glorified and transfigured.

The search for God amid the common things of life —is not this a labour that is worthy of our intellect? And is it not one very necessary in this age? We live, most of us, in a world of but too substantial fact. Things compass us on every side, environ us, shut us in. We cannot get beyond them. We cannot get through them. We cannot get over them. We are prisoners, as it were, in a crass, material universe, in the solid walls of which we can find no door of escape. Nature we see, with its iron laws and its inevitable sequences. Human life we see—its follies and sins, its pitiful sorrows and still more pitiful pleasures, its desolate dulness, its tragic ineptitude. But the God who works in Nature and governs human life—Him we discern no more. Hence comes that note of pessimism and world-weariness that sounds so stridently through recent literature. A great French writer brings to us an announcement of "the woe of living." A great English writer analyses in his novels those sentiments which he characterises as the "ache of modernism." "The world will not bear thinking of to those who know what it is," is the apophthegm of

another. And the reason of this intolerable hopelessness is surely plain. "What gives worth to this life," said the Greek sage long ago, "is the vision of Eternal Beauty." But it is just that vision which seems now to be receding. "The work of civilisation steadily advances," writes a competent critic. "The vision of a universe beyond and behind the material steadily fades."

But it is here, my brethren, in our pessimism and materialism, that religion helps us—religion with its romance, with its hill-top lights and vistas, with its stimulus to go further and deeper and higher. It bids us be brave and bold, for behind the varied show of outward things there stretch the unseen lands where dwelleth God. A medal once was coined by Charles v., on which were the Pillars of Hercules, the boundaries of the ancient world, and over them the legend *Plus ultra*—"more beyond." There is ever more beyond. Things are not merely things. "All visible things," declares Carlyle, "are emblems." And elsewhere he says, "The universe is but one vast symbol of God." Yes, always more beyond! If only we have courage to make spiritual adventure the known becomes our pathway to a loftier mystery, which in its turn guides our steps to Him who is the Beginning and the End of all.

Religion thus starts us away into the world on the romantic quest for God. He is here, we are told. He is everywhere, in all great and trivial things. In the midst of the most familiar, the most ordinary experiences, the observant eye may discover traces of His

Presence. Even in the very aspect of this monster city, cold and grey under the November sky; in the shining of the rain upon the roofs; in the drift of leaves in the park; in the rolling waters of the river; in the faces of children; in the mystery of human lives clotted behind the dingy walls of dingy houses —in any or all of these may suddenly be revealed a glory as of heaven, warning us that He whom we pursue is near. So the world becomes once more wonderful, and life once more sublime. Like the "Wild Knight" of Mr. Chesterton's poem, we travel in exultation through the dusty ways, knowing that any moment, in each small event and circumstance we may meet the Lord:—

> "For in my soul one hope for ever sings,
> That at the next white corner of a road
> My eyes may look on Him."

But, secondly, religion involves not only intellectual adventure—the quest of the vision of God; it involves, moreover, moral adventure. It is the romance of the will which, undeterred by obstacles, goes forth in search of goodness. There is nothing, perhaps, which strikes one more forcibly in reading the Gospels than the magnificent confidence with which our Lord incites His followers to extraordinary moral enterprise. No task is too difficult, no sacrifice too great for Him to ask of them. With superb disdain He sets aside all fears and doubts and prudences. "Be of good cheer," He cries to the fainting hearts—"Courage!" It is

simply a question of trustful endeavour. Let men but try, let them but risk the adventure, let them but trust in God and assay the impossible thing, and the thing will be done. "All things are possible to him that believeth." It is certainly astonishing, this romantic appeal to heroism. Christ calls men to a divine life; He bids them be perfect as their Father in heaven; He enjoins on them conduct which none of the ancient moralists ever dreamt of asking, and which many modern moralists summarily dismiss as an impracticable ideal; and He protests that all is possible if they will only trust and dare. Yet has not the Master's faith in men been amply justified? The disciples of Jesus were not, as a rule, exceptional people, but He so fired them with a sense of power and privilege and opportunity that they were able to conquer in righteousness the mightiest forces of the world. "I can do all things," says St. Paul, "in Him that strengtheneth me." And St. Cyprian later tells a similar tale. "After I had breathed the heavenly Spirit in myself . . . what was formerly hard seemed feasible, and what had appeared impossible seemed capable of being done."

In one of his books Mr. Benson has described romance as "a certain high-hearted, eager dealing with life." And it is precisely this attitude—so it seems to me—this lofty, courageous temper, that is demanded for moral excellence. The thing that is needed here is unqualified venturesomeness. We must dare to put out, to launch clear away into the

depth of great ideals, or we shall never make advancement. I know, of course, that voices of caution are raised to scare us from our quest. Men preach to us, for example, of heredity and environment. They would have us believe that the larger part of what we are is determined by our ancestors, while most of what is left is disposed of by our circumstances, so that all that we, poor fools of destiny, can do is to create modifications of a minor sort. And doubtless in this doctrine there is some colouring of truth. Yet what, after all, is the history of morals, what is the history of progress and civilisation, but the record of one huge triumph over heredity and environment—a victory won by men who, regardless of all difficulties inherited or otherwise, started forth on an adventure, who braced up their soul for a stupendous undertaking, who went out after perfection, who went out not knowing whither they went? Yes, we may not be turned from our purpose by this latest form of fatalism. If we fail, if we fall, it is certainly not of necessity. It is because we will not cultivate the heroism of romance. It is because we will not yield to the inspiration of enthusiasm. It is because we will not thoroughly commit ourselves to what is noble, or put forth the powers of our manhood to the uttermost and to the last. As Christina Rossetti sings:—

"Little or great is man;
Great if he will, or if he will
A pigmy still,
For what he will, he can."

And so you see that in the practical, moral sphere, no less than in that of the intellect, religion involves the element of pure romance. The saint, as well as the mystic, is the adventurer for God. Blithely and bravely does he plunge into the unknown. He is daunted by no danger. The lions by the way, the furies of Vanity Fair, the horrible shapes in the Valley of the Shadow—none can deflect him from the supreme pursuit. Come weal, come woe, still he will labour on. Such a one is never beaten. He falls to rise. He is strengthened by his trials. Old powers increase with use, and new, unimagined forces wake in him, so that he finds that he is capable of what he had thought impossible. Thus he is led from task to task, from quest to quest, from adventure to adventure. And ever meanwhile the goal of all his hope draws nearer, till at last there comes a day when there is borne upon his ears a distant melody of angels, and his eyes discern far away on the horizon the glimmering towers and battlements of the Jerusalem of God.

In conclusion, my brethren, I would urge on you this morning the duty of surrender to the charm of religious romance. I believe that there is not a man who is not by nature susceptible of this stimulus. I believe that there is not a man who does not, at any rate in some moments of his life, long to climb up into a mountain of vision, long to go out to a magnificent task. Deep in the soul of each one there is latent the enthusiasm of all mystics and all saints. But alas! we are busy over vulgar things. Sedulous for comfort,

intent upon profit and loss, scheming and planning for a fortune or for fame, we suffer the ardours to die. The lights one by one are extinguished. The fires burn slowly out into little heaps of ashes. Let it not be so. To you, my brethren, as to all previous generations, Christ comes with the call to romantic adventure. "Follow," He says. "Come out from your meanness and narrowness, from your deadly, prosaic routine, and follow Me. I will make you as the heroes. I will baptize you with the Spirit and with fire. I will lead you beyond the sunset, and give you the joy of adventure for God and the joy of achievement. Come and follow Me." Such is the challenge. How will you respond to it?

XII

REPENTANCE

"Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent."—MATT. iv. 17.

XII

REPENTANCE

WHEN Jesus Christ commenced His Galilean ministry the first demand He made on men was the demand for repentance. When He sent out the Twelve on their missionary journey through the country towns and villages, it was to preach "that men should repent." When He gave His last instructions to His disciples before He was taken up, He explained to them that it was in accordance with the Scriptures that "repentance . . . should be preached in His name unto all the nations." Our Lord, you see, laid most emphatic stress upon this grace of true repentance. With urgency and frequency He pressed it on men's attention. He set it before them as the condition of salvation, the absolute pre-requisite of the spiritual life, the very portal of God's kingdom. For until men will to turn themselves to God, how can they ever experience the blessings of the rule of God? until they burst the bonds that fetter them to earth, how can they know the freedom and the citizenship of heaven? So Jesus summoned men—summoned them again and again with awful earnestness—to turn, to repent, to change their state of mind, to

get transformed. To bring this change about, indeed, was a main purpose of His mission. "I am not come," he says, according to St. Luke, "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

My brethren, for us that call of Christ still sounds. Yet it seems to me that in the present day we do not sufficiently realise the necessity for repentance. To some extent we have even forgotten what repentance means. We read the great classical outpourings of the contrite soul—the Psalms, or the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, or the *Imitation* of À Kempis, or John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*—and they appear to us almost hysterical. The language of the broken spirit stirs in us no response. We cannot bring ourselves to pray, as Lancelot Andrewes used in agony to pray, "O Lord, help Thou mine impenitence; and more and more, bruise, and wound, and pierce, and strike my heart!" And the reason is, perhaps, that we have lost in some degree our sense of wrongness. We no longer feel intensely our responsibility to God. We are easy about our state. We flatter ourselves that we are not so very bad. We are on the right road; we are moving in the right direction; we are right in the main; or at any rate we are not very far wrong. And if as a form we assent that we are "miserable sinners" in the mass, we should think it most false and offensive if anyone ventured to apply such ugly words to us in detail.

But it is just this self-contented, self-applauding frame of mind that Christ declares to be worthy of

the utmost condemnation. He uses, you remember, the strongest language about it. He says that one penitent sinner gives more joy to God than ninety-nine good, self-sufficient persons. The men of Nineveh, vile as they were, shall rise and condemn an unrepentant generation: the sinners of Tyre and Sidon, nay of Sodom itself, shall fare better in the judgment. "Except ye turn," He cries, "ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." "Except ye repent ye shall all perish." What burning words! How keenly, how intensely Jesus feels about this matter, and how vehemently He speaks! He is plainly convinced that to turn to God in penitence is man's only chance. Not to do so is perdition. If the Father's love and goodness cannot lure men to repentance, if His acts of remedial sternness cannot startle them into it, if the Son's tremendous sacrifice, if the Holy Spirit's pleading leave them still unmoved—why then, their doom is sealed. They have cut themselves off from the possibilities of the future. They are lost.

But let us look into this whole question a little more attentively. And in the first place let us ask, What is the ground or reason of repentance? Why should we repent? Or rather, what should we repent of?

Now here, it seems to me, men are apt to make mistakes. They often fancy that they are called upon to show penitence merely for isolated sins, for such

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and such wrong thoughts and words and actions, for special offences, for detached transgressions. But when they come to examine themselves in the light of this idea, they find—or most of them find—that their definite wrong-doings are not of a flagrant character. The average man, for example, in this congregation to-day has probably done nothing that is outrageous. He has not defrauded anybody. He has not ill-treated anybody. He is not intemperate. He is true, in a general way, in word and dealing. He cannot accuse himself of immoral excesses, or even of grave dereliction of his religious duties. So far as committed wickedness is concerned, his conscience has no great quarrel with him. When, therefore, such a man, who thinks that sin is nothing more than the sum of acts of sin, is bidden to repent, one of two things must happen. Either he takes to heart some trifling faults, and magnifies them morbidly out of all proportion: or else, in conscious innocence of gross offence, he stands self-justified like the Pharisee of the parable, and thanks his God that he has nothing serious to repent of.

But in all this, brethren, we have certainly mistaken the true reason of repentance. If you go back to the Gospels and listen to Jesus Christ, you will find that He takes surprisingly small notice of wrong incidents of life. He goes below such incidents. He goes to the root of the matter. He goes to the life itself. What He rebukes is not so much sins as sinfulness, not the particular acts, but the general

state, not the mischoices, but the great mischoice, not what we have done so much as what we are. That is what Christ complains of. The whole of our life, He bids us know, is wrongly centred. God designed our life for Himself. He intended that it should fulfil all its highest possibilities through union with Him. He meant that it should centre in Him, be rooted in Him, develope in Him, find its fulness in Him, reach its purpose in Him. Such was His plan for us. We were destined to live as true children of God and heirs of immortality. But how has that plan been realised? Can any of us say that God is indeed and actually the centre of our existence? Can any of us say that communion with God is the chief object of our desires, or the chief interest of our intellect, or the chief motive of our actions? Can any of us say that we find in God the sphere of all employments and enjoyments, that we are ever working for God, ever moving towards God, daily passing more and more out of ourselves into God? Why, who would dare affirm it? We know only too well that our life has another centre. Our thoughts, ideals, and sympathies are very far from the Divine. It is not God that we live for. It is not to obey God's will; it is not to reflect God's goodness; it is not to reveal God's glory; it is not to promote God's kingdom. It is mainly for self and the service of self in one form or another.

Here, then, we touch the grand reason of repentance. The trouble is not the mere wrongs that can

be summed and added up, but the general state of wrongness. We are living altogether below the level of true manhood. We are seeking with all our hearts not the high things but the low things, and, worst of all, we are content to seek the low things. Our life is a blunder—false in its centre, false in its motive, false in its government—and we let it be a blunder. That is our principal wickedness; and that is why Jesus Christ "began" and continued and continues still "to preach and to say, Repent."

But now, in the second place, we are brought up with the question, What is the nature of this necessary repentance? What does repentance mean, and in what does it consist?

Well, the first element in penitence, St. Bernard has declared, is "regret for what is past." And this is the characteristic, perhaps, that first and most strikingly arrests attention. The whole literature of penitence is blotted with tears of sorrow. Its pages are red with the shame of the saints. Its great word is *Peccavi.* "O my God, my transgressions are very great, very great my sins." "I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me." "O my God! O God infinitely good! How canst Thou bear with a sinner like me?" This ache, this grief, this self-accusing sorrow seems inseparable from repentance. Even on those who know themselves forgiven, even on those who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," there falls the dark shadow of a

wasted past, the sadness of knowing that they are not what they might have been.

"Yes, Thou forgivest, but with all forgiving
Canst not renew mine innocence again:
Make Thou, O Christ, a dying of my living;
Purge from the sin, but never from the pain!"

And yet, though (as Jeremy Taylor says) repentance is "brought in at the gate of sorrow," you should clearly understand that repentance itself is something infinitely more than sorrow. It is not so much a looking backward as a looking forward. It is not so much dissent from wrong as consent to right. It is not merely grieving for the past: it is not even merely turning from the past: it is rather, in its essence, turning towards the future. Yes, repentance is starting afresh. It is facing right round from darkness to dawn, from death to life, from sin to holiness, from self to God. It is leaving the husks of exile and the swine, and seeking the mansions of the Father's house. So, if I understand Him aright, our Lord conceives of penitence. His words are wonderfully bracing and invigorative. He does not say, Perpetually lament your sin. He says, Get rid of your sin. Put it behind you. Have done with it altogether. "Go, and sin no more." There is tonic in such utterance. Christ carries us to the mountain, to the pure air and the sunrise. Lift up your heart, He says. Be a new man, He says. Come over from the side of Satan to the side of God, He says. You shall

receive the power to do so, if you have the will to do so.

> "Can it be true, this grace He is declaring?
> O let us trust Him for His words are fair!
> Man, what is this, and why art thou despairing?
> God shall forgive thee all but thy despair."

The late Dr. Bright defined repentance as "a thorough-going movement of the whole being away from sin and towards the love and service of God." And I ask you to note those words—"a thorough-going movement of the whole being." Repentance knows no half-measures. It is not the correction of this little failing or that little failing. It is not patch-work. It is renovation of the whole state, and the whole nature, and the whole personality—renovation through and through, and out and out. That is what Bishop Wilson meant when he wrote, "There is no repentance where there is no change of heart." That is what Martin Luther meant when he spoke of repentance as "a real bettering and change of the entire life." That is what St. Paul meant in his doctrine of the "new creature." That is what the Saviour meant when He said to men, "Change your mind"—not merely change your actions or your habits, but your mind, your thoughts, your aims, your inner attitude, your very self. "Look to thy repentance," writes Richard Baxter, "that it be deep and absolute, and free from hypocritical exceptions and reserves." Yes, if we are truly penitent we shall be willing to give up all that we are to God; to put our

whole nature—body, soul and spirit, mind, desire and will—in subjection to His discipline. At the foot of the Cross and at the throne of God we shall offer our*selves* a sacrifice. That is our only chance. "By an evil loving of myself," writes one who had entered deeply into the experience of repentance—"by an evil loving of myself I lost myself, and by seeking Christ alone and purely loving Him, I found both myself and Him."

This, then, I take it, is the essence of repentance. It is change. It is thorough change. It is change to life and light. Such was the watchword that rang throughout Galilee when "Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent."

And then, lastly, let us ask one final question. How is this repentance, this thorough-going change to life and light, to be produced and brought about in us?

As to that, for a Christian there can be but one answer—the answer which is given by all those heroic spirits who have risen from sin to holiness, and found the peace that passeth understanding in the service of God. The men of the New Testament, the men whose personalities shine out on us so brightly in the biographies of saints, the men whose religious experiences are recorded by scientific investigators like Prof. James, the Christian men whom we ourselves encounter in our casual intercourse—all say one thing. They tell us that true repentance only is attained by

opening the mind to the influence of Jesus Christ. "Him," as St. Peter long ago declared, "did God exalt . . . to give repentance." And if to-day men are no longer sinfully self-satisfied, if to-day they are honestly striving to live for a larger ideal, if to-day they are really entering on a diviner life, it is not due to themselves. It is owing, simply and solely, to the Spirit, the power, the influence of the redeeming Christ.

And how does Jesus Christ lead humanity to repentance? Well, to begin with, when we come to Him, we learn—do we not?—to know ourselves as we really are. By the side of His perfection we can appraise our imperfection, and thereby take the first step towards getting rid of imperfection. "If you would be good," writes Epictetus, "first believe that you are bad." "There is no road to moral or intellectual improvement," said Benjamin Jowett, "like the knowledge of our own defects." "The greatest of faults," runs an aphorism of Carlyle, "is to be conscious of none." There are many who come to Jesus cheerful and self-confident, pleased with themselves and with their own attainments; but, once the bright vision of His excellence has flashed upon them, they can but fall in utter abasement at His feet, and say, "I am a sinful man, O Lord."

But again, when we have been a little while with Jesus, we learn something more. We learn not only our own lamentable state; we somehow get to know that in the Person of Jesus Christ the infinite Love of

God is drawing us from that state. God touches us in Jesus. God takes hold of us in Jesus. Through Jesus God gives us assurance that He loves us still, that in spite of all our sin He trusts us still—trusts in our gratitude, trusts in our loyalty, trusts in our willingness to make a fresh start, trusts in our steadfastness when the fresh start has been made. Through Jesus we know that God will never give us up; but even though the sheep wander far into the wilderness, the Good Shepherd will go after it, and will seek it till He find it, will carry it home on His shoulders rejoicing. And this amazing, sin-forgiving, reconciling Love of God, that makes itself felt in Jesus—what a force it becomes in our sin-stricken humanity! This Love of God, that culminates ineffably on the Cross at Calvary—how it stirs us to rise and fight the battle with our sin! How it heartens us with hope! How it stimulates endeavour! How it stiffens us to prove worthy of such boundless confidence! O surely it works; the miracle of the Divine compassion works. We begin to be changed. We can dwell no more with strangers in the distant country. We long for our Father; we arise; we go to Him; we cry, "Father, I have sinned." And then we hear the Voice: "Bring forth the best robe"—the robe of righteousness—"and put it on him. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

Yes, brethren, let me say it once again; it is by opening the mind to the influence of Jesus Christ that we are brought to a saving repentance. You know

the old, beautiful stories. The sinful woman melts in weeping at Christ's feet, and then goes forth into another life, while rainbows of hope shine through the falling tears. The peculating tax-collector takes Christ home with him to his house, and straightway in his heart there blossoms a high resolve which makes him worthy to be called a son of Abraham. The savage persecutor meets Christ suddenly on the way, and lo! he is consecrated missionary and apostle. The dying robber turns to the Form on the centre cross, and the gates of Paradise open to receive him with Christ. And in this same Jesus you and I still find salvation by repentance. We cannot, in any real sense of the word, repent ourselves. We cannot retrieve the past, or redeem the present, or ensure the future. We cannot effect the necessary, thorough-going change to life and light. But the Christ who triumphs in us can and will. And if we but consent to commit ourselves to His guidance, He will lead us, step by step, all the way up from the valleys of degradation to the supremest height of excellence, to the face of God.

"That it may please Thee to give us true repentance." May this be the daily earnest prayer of each! That it may please Thee to make us truly realise what we are. That it may please Thee to make us truly long for what we are not. That it may please Thee to wake in our souls the hunger and thirst after righteousness. That it may please Thee to strengthen

our wills to do the works of righteousness. That it may please Thee to change us thoroughly, to transform us, to conform us to Thyself. And finally, that it may please Thee to number us at the last amid that blessed company of penitents redeemed, who "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: for the Lamb shall be their shepherd: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

XIII

POWER

"The Power of God."—Rom. i. 16.

XIII

POWER

WE are often reminded nowadays that the age in which we live is a practical age. The saying repeated again and again in pulpit and on platform and in the press, has long since become a commonplace. And if by a practical age we mean, not indeed an age which does not think, but an age which values thought less for itself than for its results, an age which lays the stress more on achievement than on argument, more on action than on opinion, the term, I suppose, is justified. The ideal of our time is practical effectiveness. "Our attention," it has been said, "is fixed on power. We have given up problems and taken up programmes. We are no longer principally concerned in trying to make out what things mean. We are principally concerned in making things what we want them to be."

Now when, in this practical temper, and under the stress of modern movements and developments, we turn to our religion, we find (as indeed the men of every age have found) that it is singularly adapted to our peculiar need. For Christianity is the religion of

power. The Gospel is not primarily a system for the intellect, though it certainly does present a reasoned system for the intellect; it is not primarily an appeal to the emotions, though it certainly does appeal very touchingly to the emotions; it is first and foremost, as the apostle said, "the power of God unto salvation." The message it brings is a message of power, the gift it offers is a gift of power, the men it produces are men of power. And the Gospel of Jesus is the Gospel for this century just because to persons oppressed by the strain of rapidly-changing conditions, harassed by forces which they cannot escape, and by passions which they cannot subdue, and by mysteries which they cannot resolve, it opens out an inexhaustible supply of life, of strength, of energy, of confidence and of power.

I

Christianity, then, I say, is power. And it has been so from the beginning. Go back to the very starting-point, where Jesus stands, uncrowned as yet, in the dawn of the Christian centuries. What is the first impression that His Personality creates? Is it not an impression of reserved yet sovereign power? That certainly was the quality that struck our Lord's contemporaries. "God anointed him," St. Peter says, "with power." To a soldier He seemed a commander pre-eminently to be obeyed. To practical men engaged in their ordinary business He came as a master whom

at all costs they must follow. To minds diseased or agonised one word of His brought calm. There hung about Him a strange force of majesty that smote to the ground the instruments of perverted justice, that filled even a cynical Roman with vague awe and alarm, that exacted the dying homage of a malefactor on the cross—a force of such marvellous potency that its spell is felt even now. You remember, perhaps, how Napoleon expressed his astonishment at Christ's power. "I," he exclaimed, "can gain but a wavering influence over the men whose ear and eye I can catch; this man, vanished for eighteen hundred years, still holds the characters of men as in a vice."

And again, if you turn from the Founder to the society that He founded, you will note a similar phenomenon. For what is the story of the Christian society but the story of the manifestation of extraordinary power? No sooner was Christ departed than there came upon His followers a remarkable visitation of victorious energy. A new, redeeming, character-making force took hold of them, lifting and delivering them from frailty and feebleness, and enabling them for tasks wherein success seemed scarcely credible. In Christians of every period you can recognise that force. You may see it in St. Paul and St. John and St. Augustine: in St. Athanasius when he stood alone against the world; in Francis and Fénelon, Luther and Loyola, Bernard and Bunyan, Savonarola and John Wesley. You see it more rudely manifested in the valour of Crusaders, in the zeal of

Cromwell's Ironsides, and of the Puritans of New England. Or you see it, in form less martial and more gracious, exhibited in simple and self-sacrificing lives, that have shown amid labours and sufferings how much "the power of God," possessing and possessed by man, can do. Yes, brethren: in spite of checks, in spite of reactions, in spite of opposition from without and from within, that force has continually wrought; and to-day it is mightier, perhaps, than it has ever been. The kingdom of God is indeed, as St. Paul declared, "in power."

II

Here then, is a force, extraordinary and far-reaching—a force which has accomplished most amazing miracles. What are we to make of it? What can we say of it? Wherein lies the secret, the essence of Christianity's power?

Now when I think over it quietly and try to analyse this power, I come to the conclusion that it depends upon two things. It rests on a reality and on the experience of the reality. It rests on a fact and on the possession of the fact. It rests on a truth and on the response to the truth. Once give a man this truth and this reality, once let him feel it, realise it, utilise it, once set it home to him as a principle of his being, and there will spring in that man power that is certain of the victory.

Just consider this a moment, for it is worth

consideration. I say that the first element of the Christian's power is a fact, or truth, or reality. And what is this reality? My brethren, it is none other than the Living God Himself. And it is the Living God as Christianity represents Him. It is God the Father who loves all of us as His children, God the eternal Son who makes it possible for us to live as sons of God, and God the Holy Ghost who, by dwelling in our hearts, enables us to actualise the possibility of sonship. God, the Living God, the Blessed Trinity—this is the mighty reality that is the ultimate basis of power. And this reality, you should further observe, is powerful, just for the reason that it is indeed a reality. It is not a mere opinion of a fallible philosophy, not a mere doctrine of a dogmatising Church, not a mere inference from the words of a sacred Book: it is real, it is true, it is solid, it is factual. It is the thing that is. Whether we know it or not, and whether we interpret it aright or not, the fact stands thus, and nothing can alter it. The Living God is real. The Father's uncontrollable and illimitable love is real. The Son wills really to redeem us, and the Holy Spirit really does His work. This is eternal verity. This is the rock on which has been laid the foundation of spiritual power.

Now there are some sentences of Addison which may help us at this point. "The person," he writes, "who has a firm trust in the Supreme Being is powerful in His power, wise by His wisdom, happy in His happiness. He reaps the benefit of every Divine

attribute, and loses his own insufficiency in the fulness of Infinite Perfection." Those words disclose the second element necessary for power. And if the first element be the Living God, this second and no less necessary element is a "firm trust" in Him, a living faith. For, to produce in us actual force, the reality must be experienced, and the fact must be felt to be fact, and the truth by faith responded to. It is not enough, you see, that God be God. It is not enough even that God be confessed to be God—that He be believed in by the intellect, and accepted by the judgment. "There is a faith," says Neander, "which saves; there is not a dogmatic which saves." If the Living God is to be power for us, He must verily live in us, and be God in us, *our* God. He must come home to us. He must be real, not for the head alone, but for the heart and the feeling and the affections and the will—real in the life, real in the whole of experience, so real that we cannot but give ourselves to Him unreservedly. Charles Kingsley in one of his novels makes a character exclaim: "I want a faith past arguments; one which, whether I can prove it or not to the satisfaction of the lawyers, I believe to my own satisfaction, and act on it as undoubtingly and unreasoningly as I do upon my own personal identity. I don't want to possess a faith. I want a faith to possess me." And it is just in this passion of faith, my brethren—in this passion of faith which yields with such joy to the Living Lord who possesses and masters us, that the Christian dynamic

is found. We are strong when we gladly submit to the Reality that environs us. We are strong when we make ourselves instruments of the Energy that presses us. We are strong when we open the door of our being to the Life that would enter us. When the Divine thought steals into the receptive mind, and the Divine purpose dominates the obedient will, and the Divine love warms and invigorates the responsive heart, then indeed we are strong, for then have we something of the Living God's own power.

III

A reality and the experience of the reality, the Living God and the living faith that lays hold on Him—these, let us grant, are the constituents of power. Now finally let us take one hasty glance at this power itself, as it is felt and manifested. When the Living God comes to His own in a man, what happens?

Well, first there is an inward effect, which may best be described, perhaps, as stability and security. It is Emerson, you remember, who says about character that it is "the impossibility of being displaced or overset." And this unshakable strength in the face of adverse circumstances, this undisturbed tranquillity in the midst of fatigues and struggles, is the very mark of the Christian. Once let a man be possessed by the Living God, and he is carried away into a realm of restfulness. He is quite sure of God, quite sure of

himself as God's. He can afford to be strong and quiet. Life now becomes for him "a solemn scorn of ills." He does not quail before the hostility of men —how should he when Infinitude Itself is on his side? He is not fluttered by the world's uncertainties; for the best that the world can offer, the true blessedness on earth, unalterably is his. He discharges his daily duties without fretfulness or anxiety; for he knows that, as Ruskin has said, "God always gives us strength and sense enough for what He wants us to do," so that, "if we either tire ourselves or puzzle ourselves it is our own fault." The man lies low in the hand of God. He lives with God, and in accordance with the eternal laws of God, and "the power of God," that brings security and rest, is in him.

"Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt Him, nor deny;
Yea, with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I. . . .

Who that one moment has the least descried Him,
Dimly and faintly, hidden and afar,
Doth not despise all excellence beside Him,
Pleasures and powers that are not and that are—

Ay, amid all men bear himself thereafter
Smit with a solemn and a sweet surprise,
Dumb to their scorn, and turning to their laughter
Only the dominance of earnest eyes?"

But this is not all. For when God comes to a man, He not only works an inward effect of stability and security, but He fills him with out-going energy.

He inspires Him to act, to dare and to do, to become, in his measure, a force in the world's progress and in history.

Perhaps in times past this active and outward side of Christian power has not fully been appreciated. We have tended too much to think of God's grace as a sort of private luxury; as power of comfort rather than power of usefulness; as a thing to be enjoyed rather than a thing to be employed. Our religion has been too passive, too restricted in its scope, too selfish. How often, when men have looked to us for a display of saving energy, have we shown cowardice and indifference! How often, where protest was needed, have we allowed ourselves to be silent, and deliberately refrained from touching subjects that are dangerous! How often have we been overcome by fear of the unpopularity that is excited by interference with men's passions or their profits! Our own consciences condemn us. And yet already, I think, the large and glorious meaning of "the power of God" is beginning to be recognised. Religion, we begin to see, is more than privilege. It is fruitfulness, and energy, and activity, and force. It is the might of the Almighty in the soul of man, put forth for suppressing abuses, put forth for relieving suffering, put forth for the betterment of social conditions, put forth for grappling with and mastering the complicated problems of a commercial and industrial age. Yes, religion is all of that. Communion with God means power, and power

that can be applied; and we are traitors alike to the power and to its Giver, unless it be applied.

To-day, my brethren, you are commemorating the dedication of your church. Let me remind you, then, in conclusion, that this church, like every other church, is expressly designed to be a centre of spiritual power. That is the idea, the very notion of your church. That is its function in Christendom. To you, who are dwellers in this neighbourhood of London, this church is a consecrated medium for the distribution of God's power. Here, through the channels appointed, through service and through sacrament, you may draw without stint on the supplies of heavenly energy. Here you may learn, if you will, how to utilise that energy. Here there is current of force, both in-come and out-put of Divine, redeeming power. And my message to you this morning, in view of that fact, is this:—Do not neglect this power. Lay hold of it; cling fast to it; make use of it. Here, in this place, at this altar, lay hold of the Living God from whom the power proceeds. For then the eternal power shall come upon you, and the Spirit of the Most High shall rest with might upon you, to strengthen your minds, and to quicken your wills, and to establish your lives for ever.

XIV

INSPIRATION IN HUMAN LIFE

"The inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding."—Job xxxii. 8.

XIV

INSPIRATION IN HUMAN LIFE

MAETERLINCK, in one of the finest of his essays, has a parable of some blind men who travelled a long distance that they might hear their god. They seated themselves on the steps of the sanctuary and waited and waited ; and when some one asked them what they were doing out there in the courtyard, "We are waiting," they answered, shaking their heads, "and God has not yet said a single word." But they had not seen that the great brass doors of the temple were closed, and they knew not that the shrine within was all the while resounding with the voice of Deity.

Now it seems to me that many of us to-day are not unlike the blind men of that legend. We are constantly wondering why God is not here. We look for Him in our lives, and we say that He appears not. We do not observe that, amid the throng and press of things, He is ever passing by. We listen for His voice, and complain that all is silence. Yet never for an instant does He cease to speak, if we will but throw open the door and lend attentive ears. God is not dumb, nor dead, nor distant. He is present to-

day, as He was present in the past, to inspire the faithful soul, and it is only our own blindness and stupidity and egotism that hinder the fact being recognised. "What is there between Him and thee?" writes a deep thinker. "Nothing but thyself." "The clear sky bends over each man, little or great; let him uncover his head, there is nothing between him and infinite space."

Let me speak to you this morning on the inspiration of God in human life. "Inspiration," you know, is a difficult word, which has not been made much easier by the explanations of the learned. But in a rough-and-ready way, perhaps, it may be characterised as influence. It is the influence of one person on another person, the influence of the Divine Person on the human person, the influence of the Spirit of God on the spirit of man. That is inspiration —the personal action of the personal God on persons. And I take it that there is not a man who is not, at any rate in some degree, susceptible of this influence. There is not a man who may not, if he will, be conscious of a larger Life enfolding and controlling his own little life, who may not feel mysterious impulsions of the Spirit, and hear within him whispers of the heavenly harmonies. Inspiration is always possible. "Even here," writes Bishop Westcott, referring to some of the darkest features of Durham society—"even here there is, we can feel, material which the Spirit can transfigure."

I

Consider, then, some of the ways in which God's inspiration is felt. And take, to begin with, the intellectual part of man. Have we not all known moments of sudden illumination when some idea, some truth, some vision came flashing upon the mind, irradiating it with an inexplicable splendour? Whence did it come? The truth or beauty I perceive is not my own. I cannot make a truth. I cannot create a truth. It comes to me somehow—as a surprise, as a discovery. I find it as it is; I do not make it what it is. Nor have I power to command my highest thoughts. Nietzsche says somewhere: "A thought comes when 'it' wishes, not when 'I' wish." "Whence and how my ideas come I know not, nor can I force them," writes Mozart. "Often," says Philo, "when I have come to write out the doctrines of philosophy, though I knew well what I ought to say, I have found my mind dry and barren, and renounced the task in despair. At other times, though I came empty, I was suddenly filled with thoughts showered on me from above like snowflakes." Whence came those thoughts? Ah, that is just the problem. Whence came to the men of science the revelation of the laws that order and explain the seeming chaos of phenomena? Whence came to the philosophers those eternal truths and principles of which a Greek poet has said that "mortal infirmity did not preside over their birth, nor shall forgetful-

ness ever lay them to sleep," for "there is in them a great divinity that grows not old"? Whence came to you and me that unexpected vision, that sudden solution of a long-perplexing puzzle, that gust of conviction sweeping swiftly through the soul with overwhelming power? From ourselves? Nay, brethren; may we not rather say from God? We sometimes talk of sages and of artists as "inspired," and the phrase is not merely a figure of speech. Down, deep down below the surface of our consciousness, down in the dimness of the abysses of our being, down at the unexplored foundations and roots of life, the Spirit of God has contact with the spirit of man. It is His motions that we feel; it is His influence that we experience. When the mind is enlightened, when truth becomes clear, when beauty enraptures, when a star-like idea blazes in upon the intellect, when we feel, as it were, a shock of the ineffable—it is then that the Spirit of God is moving mightily within us, and we are inspired, intellectually inspired, by Him.

Or take again the moral part of man. Has it ever occurred to you to wonder what it is that constitutes the constraining power of duty? Why is it that, almost in spite of themselves, men feel obliged to do their duty? Only think of the force of that little word "ought." There are many great words and many potent words—"money" and "pleasure" and "reputation" and "home" are among such words; but the "ought" of duty is a greater word, and over and over again it outbalances all the rest. Here is

the British soldier depicted by Rudyard Kipling. He is not, you will agree, by any means an ideal character. His language is not choice nor his habits beyond criticism ; in his morals and religion he leaves much to be desired. But see him in the supreme moment, when the battle-storm is raging and death is hideously abroad ; see him when all that he loves is on this side—sweetheart and wife, comfort and gain, a whole body and a long life—and when duty alone is on that side. What happens ? Why, in case after case and instance after instance, the man instinctively, half-blindly, half-unwillingly perhaps—impelled by a sort of " demonic " possession—goes for his duty. All that he loves is in one scale and duty alone is in the other scale. Yet the first scale goes up and the second scale goes down. Duty wins. Or here is the Californian miner described to us by Bret Harte—a rude, rough, riotous, fortune-hunting reprobate, an untamed man who, under ordinary conditions, makes little account of his moral obligations. But see him, too, in the supreme moment of existence, when all that he most cares about is flung into the one scale and duty, stark and naked, is left lying in the other scale. What happens ? Why, in case after case and instance after instance, the first scale goes up and the second scale goes down. Duty wins. Why is it ? How is it that such men—commonplace, uneducated, unheroic, vulgar men – can make such prodigious sacrifices for duty, can set themselves thus in Titanic opposition to all the delectable things that

beckon and allure? May we not here again discern the effects of inspiration? "Man's conscience," runs a famous line of Byron, "is the oracle of God." And may we not say that the magic attraction of duty is the magnetism of God? Men feel the drawing of the "Power that makes for righteousness." They are carried beyond themselves by an unearthly energy. The Spirit of the Lord is upon them; they are filled and fired and morally inspired by Him.

Or take once more the affectional part of man —the sphere of the heart, of the sentiments and emotions. Do we not here find much that can properly be accounted for only by inspiration? Think, for example, of love in its highest form—the Christian love. Christ says, you remember, that we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. He says that we are to love all with whom we come in contact—the ugly, the dull, the wicked, the weak, the people who annoy us, the people who hate us, even the people who bore and borrow from us. Nor are we justified in watering down that phrase. Our Lord says, Love. He does not say merely, Be considerate to these people. He does say, Love them; love them as yourselves; surround your uninteresting and uninterested neighbour with the same warm feeling and sympathy that you give to your own selves. But surely that is impossible. To unaided human nature it is ridiculously impossible. The practical man, the common-sense, business man must simply laugh at the idea. It is so impossible. And yet the thing has been done.

The impossible has happened. There have been men, and still more women, who have achieved this unachievable, and have lived this love. And how, I ask you, do you account for that? How do you account for a Francis or a Xavier, for a John Howard or a Father Damien or a Florence Nightingale, for a thousand incarnate enigmas of divine charity and philanthropy? For myself I can only fall back on the explanation of St. John, "If we love one another God dwelleth in us." That seems to be the secret. "God dwelleth in us." Whenever we love—not with the sham love which is but self-love in disguise, but really, genuinely, self-forgetfully—then the very Spirit of Love is abiding in us, and we are inspired, affectionally inspired, by Him.

I think that I need not say much about the religious part of man. We have most of us, I suppose, had seasons of religious inspiration. How often in our exalted moments—in prayer, in meditation, in the Sacrament of the Broken Body and the Blood that is shed—have we been shadowed by a Presence! How often have we been conscious of subtle feelings and vibrations that testify in the soul that God Himself is there! Indeed it seems to me that all that is best and holiest in our religious life is due to the stimulus of the inbreathing Deity. Aspiration, for instance—is it not from inspiration? "Not without special grace," writes Clement of Alexandria, "does the soul put forth its wings." Or faith—is it not the experience of the Presence of the Highest or, as

Pascal has described it, "God sensible to the heart"? Yes; wherever we turn we find the mystery of God's action. The Christian life in its every phase is but one story—the story of a voice, of a vision, of a light, of a visitation, of an inspiration.

"I have heard the Voice of Jesus;
Tell me not of aught beside.
I have seen the Face of Jesus;
All my soul is satisfied."

II

Thus, brethren, we have found God, standing over against all our faculties and experiences, standing in all four quarters of the world of human consciousness, waiting to inspire, ready to mingle His truth with our intellect, His righteousness with our conscience, His love with our affections, His fulness with our soul. "The Lord," says a mystic, "flows into the spirits of angels and of men." That is God's part in this affair of inspiration. But what, we may ask, is our part in the matter? How can we best prepare to receive the Divine impressions? How can we put ourselves in the line of heavenly influences? What must we do to become effectually inspired?

Now there are three practical laws conditioning inspiration to which very briefly I would direct your attention. The first of these laws I will call the Law of Activity. Be active, it says. Be alert. Be alive. Exercise your faculties. Cultivate your talents. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. He

will never inspire you as corpses, only as living, acting, energising men. Activity, you perceive, is here the rule. I do not deny, of course, that there are special times and occasions when passivity may be necessary; when the soul must be still beneath the Hand of God, must become, as it were, an instrument whereon the Spirit may make music. But such cases, I think, are exceptional. "God generally gives spiritual blessings," writes Robert South, "as He does temporal, that is, by the mediation of an active and vigorous industry." Yes, activity is the rule. Do you wish, my brethren, to be inspired with truth? Then you must exercise your mental powers in quest of truth—think hard, face doubt, enquire, wrestle with problems, keep the mind at work. God's thought is kindled in the active brain. Or do you wish to be inspired with justice? Then with all your strength you must cultivate your moral powers. You must learn to decide for the right and to fight for the right. It is the most practised conscience that the Spirit most illuminates. Or do you wish to be inspired with love or faith or holiness? Then use to the full your affectional and religious powers; be active in love, be active in faith, be active in holiness. As a man acts, so is he acted on. What we put into life, that, pretty much, do we get out of life. The more we toil, the more we make effort, the more we think and will and trust and send out love, the more do we receive from the Giver of all good gifts, and the greater is our measure of the grace of inspiration.

Take notice, then, of this momentous principle of activity. Divine strength comes with action. Life, active life, the exercise of life—that is the primary condition of inspiration.

The second law I will call the Law of Expectancy. It warns us to be ever on the watch for the coming of God, ever ready for His touch, ever receptive of His influence. For the danger is great that amid the activities of our life—however rightful they may be, and unexceptionable in themselves—we fail to pay attention to the Divine forces that encompass us. Our horizons grow restricted. We tend to be more and more absorbed in the immediate present. We are always so occupied; occupied with business, occupied with society, occupied with politics and speeches and the newspapers, occupied with the dominant sensation of the moment—the latest discovery, the freshest freak of fashion, the newest amusement, the most recent book; so occupied and interested and taken up and busy that God gets crowded out of our consciousness altogether. It is not that we disbelieve in God or disdain His inspiration; it is simply that we are so immersed in the noise and rush and scramble of our world that the Divine approaches to us pass unheeded. And so there is urgent need to cultivate expectancy—the habit of looking for God, of listening for His Voice, of keeping each part of our nature open to His inflow. By recollecting God, St. Francis of Sales used to say, we draw God unto us. Already One is standing at the threshold by our door,

and at any time He may enter. At any hour, at any moment—as we think, as we work, as we read, as we walk in the street, as we gaze at a picture or listen to music or talk with a friend—at any hour, at any moment the Guest of our soul may come. Be ready for Him, then. Be prepared for Him. Expect Him. Expectancy is the second condition of inspiration.

And then, lastly, there is the third law—the precept of obedience. "It is necessary," writes Pascal, "to offer ourselves humbly to the inspiration." Men often complain, you know, of the evanescence of God's influence. The Spirit, they tell us, comes and goes. Truth suddenly appears, and then as suddenly is withdrawn. There is no continuance, no consecutiveness. "'Tis with us," cries Emerson, "a flash of light, then a long darkness, then a flash again. . . . Could we but turn these fugitive sparkles into an astronomy of Copernican worlds!" And the experience undoubtedly is a familiar one. How often has the history of our own inspiration—intellectual or moral, affectional or religious—been but the history of "the light that failed." One moment we were walking in the sunshine near to God; the next, alone and helpless, we were stumbling in the darkness. And why is this? In general, I think, the reason lies in the fact that we do not see fit to obey the inspiration. We are wilful and self-assertive. We like to lead, not follow; to choose for ourselves a way, to force things to go our way. We are not

content submissively to take God's way. We do not heed the Voice, we do not respond to the summons, we are not loyal to the prompting. And so the resisted influence by degrees grows weaker, and God at last departs and leaves us to go, if we please, astray our way. Here, then, we see the importance of the third law of inspiration. It is the principle of submission, of surrender, of obedience. It is the principle of St. Paul—"I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." It is the principle of St. Augustine —"Give what Thou dost command, and command what Thou wilt." It is the principle of Fénelon— "Demand, enjoin, forbid: what wilt Thou have me to do?" It is the principle of Newman—"Lead Thou me on." It is the principle that breathes through the words of the quaint mediæval hymn:—

> "As the sunflower ever turning to the mighty sun,
> With the faithfulness of fealty following only one,
> So make me, Lord, to Thee."

Everything depends upon the principle of obedience. Disloyalty to inspiration means loss of inspiration. But the moment we yield ourselves utterly to God His Spirit will stream in on us, inspiring us with truth, inspiring us with justice, inspiring us with love, inspiring us with faith, sustaining and perfecting us, and leading us at last to the Holy of Holies, where the Light never fades and the Divine Presence is perpetual. "And if thou canst get thither," says an old writer, "there grows the flower of peace."

"The inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." My brethren, do you believe this doctrine of inspiration? Do you really believe in the action and the influence of the ever-living God on your own human life? Do you believe that there is a Mind which enlightens yours, a Will which gives strength to yours, a Heart that communicates with yours, a Soul which supports, uplifts, and sanctifies your soul? Do you believe that through all the avenues of your higher faculties the Spirit of God may flood into you, bringing satisfaction to every part of your nature, and filling with His blessings the entire compass of your being? Then you may have courage for this rough business of life. You are not alone; for in each temple-heart still dwells the eternal God. In reason and conscience you may hear His utterance, in love you may feel His breath, in faith may perceive a revelation of His glory. The Father is near His children. To-day, as in the past, the pure in heart see God, and those who live actively, expectantly, obediently receive from Him inspiration to guide them through their pilgrimage.

XV

AN ORDINATION SERMON

"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you; as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."—St. John xx. 21.

XV

AN ORDINATION SERMON

IT was the evening of the greatest day in history, and the little company of the disciples sat watching anxiously within locked doors. They had waited all day for Jesus, but Jesus had not come. And now it was evening, and their hopes perhaps had dwindled with the setting of the sun, when suddenly, silently—without the sound of footfall or the warning of opened door—He was there. "Jesus stood in the midst and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said He showed unto them His hands and His side. . . . Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you; as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

I have chosen these last words, my brethren, because I feel that the idea which they express, of a Divine sending, is one which at this time should be uppermost in our minds. For herein lies the reason and explanation of that most solemn action on which we are engaged. To-day our Lord is sending out His servants. He is sending them as really and effectually as He sent those first disciples on the resurrection night. He is come here to commit to them a special office, and

a special function, and a special privilege, and a special trust. And He is come—we may dare to believe it—in His very Person; and the authority and power, which historically have been transmitted by His ministers through the centuries, He Himself within this hour will inwardly convey. Yes, it is Jesus Christ Himself that sends. You may almost hear Him speak the words of ordination. You may almost feel the stirring of the breath He breathed on His apostles long ago.

"So send I you." There can surely be no doubt as to the character and intention of this sending. In the light of the Master's utterance, its meaning stands quite clear. This mission is not something separate. It is not something new, or unprecedented, or particular. It is simply the application and the continuation of the very mission entrusted by the Father to our Lord Himself. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." We ministers of Christ are sent, that is to say, after the same manner in which our Lord was sent. We are sent to do the thing He had to do. We are sent to do it in the way He did it. The purpose of Jesus is to be our purpose. The methods of Jesus are to be our methods. The sphere of action of Jesus is our sphere of action. And we, unworthy though we be, are ordained to carry on our Saviour's saving work. A long way behind, with innumerable stumblings and innumerable errors, we yet do follow in our Master's footsteps, we yet do share in our Master's toil and task. And for this it is

that He sends us—He the Apostle and Representative of the Father, us the apostles of the Father's Son.

Consider for a moment two chief aspects of this mission. Our Lord, as you know, was sent into the world to save mankind, and He was sent to do so partly by the perfect revelation of the Father, and partly by the free surrender of Himself to and for men in sacrifice. These were the characteristic features of His ministry. And it is mainly in these two things—in revelation and in sacrificial service—that the ministry of those who in their turn are sent by Him consists.

Take first the revelation. It is only "the vision of the ideal," said Bishop Westcott, that "guards the monotony of work from becoming the monotony of life." And the words, I think, are not without their application in the present day. Our age, immersed in multitudinous material interests, has to a certain extent lost touch with the things invisible. It is not convinced supremely and emphatically of the truths which it seems to believe. Men do not grasp the Gospel. They do not actually realise it, and all that it implies. They are not held by it, compelled by it, constrained by it, crucified and killed and raised again by it. They are not in downright earnest with the verities of the spirit, as they are about the social and political questions of the hour. Yes, the vision of the Divine, so vividly apprehended in certain periods of history, has in a measure faded. And what are the results? Think of the unilluminated dulness which

besets so many lives, with their dreary mechanical round of uninspired routine. Think of the dead monotony. Look at the hard, sad faces of the toiling millions round you, as they plod on endlessly, day after day, under one blank, hopeless, colourless stretch of leaden sky. Are there not here results? "The days are prolonged," so the Hebrews used to say, "and every vision faileth": and the proverb adds, "where there is no vision the people perish."

It was a great English writer who said: "The more I think of it, I feel this conviction more impressed on me, that the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way." But just that, my brethren, is the privilege and the function of the ministers of Christ. They come to do for men the greatest thing that any man can do for men. Seers themselves, and penetrated with their vision, they come to make others see. They preach, they teach, they exhort, they warn: they pray for their generation with the prayer of the prophet Elisha, that the darkened eyes may be opened and the horses and chariots of fire that fill the mountain be revealed: they utter the call of Philip, "Come and see": they strive like St. Paul "to enlighten all as to what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God." Let no one presume to despise their revelation. They are sent by Jesus Christ to impart their own experience of the grand realities—to make men feel the power and comfort of a Real

Presence; to make them hear God's footsteps sounding all along the way; to teach them to sing His psalm, "I have set the Lord always before me, because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved." In the midst of human blindness, sorrow, grossness, sin, despondency, they uplift the great conceptions of the Perfect and the Divine. And to every burdened man they carry the saving message of a heavenly Friend and Companion who is ever at his side. No matter how cabined and confined he be in mean materialities, no matter how drudging his work, how narrow his outlook; for him too there are songs. For him too comes the morning. He also has a Saviour and a home of glory.

But secondly, along with the revelation goes the sacrifice and the service. "A religious," said St. Francis once, "only preacheth well inasmuch as he worketh well, for the preacher is known by his works." Our calling, with its wonderful horizons, its immeasurably lofty firmaments and doctrines, has also its earthly duties, its little every-day fidelities, its readiness to help all those within its reach. It is service. It is sacrifice. It is going about doing good. It is taking the basin and towel, and washing the dust-stained feet. It is the cross, and the blood, and the crown of thorns, and the love that longs to die rather than that another should die, and which gladly gives itself that another may be blessed. Here is the second aspect of our mission, and it is inseparable from the first. We are sent to teach: we are sent to

serve. But "the sublimest argument ends in service, and service itself is the sublimest argument."

And further, this service of ours is no ordinary service. For if we are sent at all, we are sent to take a share in the very ministry of our Lord Himself. Our service, as I have said, is the representment and the continuation of His service. Our labour is indissolubly joined to His. We are actually brought into a partnership with Him who "came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." And what a tremendous obligation does that fellowship lay upon us! We remember, with shame for ourselves, how utterly Christ gave Himself. Of Tissot's 365 drawings of His life, no less than 310, I believe, are concerned with the ministry and passion: and yet even that proportion is inadequate to express the place which service occupied in the life of the Great Pastor. Why, surely His every act, His every word and thought, was service. The whole of His life was one long sacrificing of Himself for others. And when there was nothing further that His life could give, He gave the life itself a willing sacrifice in death. Well might our Lord, looking into the eager faces of His apostles, ask, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" Well may He put to us that question now!

Yet, if we are really called into Christ's redemptive process, we are bound in our measure to give ourselves as freely as He gave Himself in His. Never will He who sends accept our hands half-full. He asks us for

our all—body, soul and spirit—all that we are, and all that we hope to be, and all that God's grace shall enable us to be. He asks for entire surrender of the entire man to His work. And He could not ask for less. For as is the Sender, so must be the sent. "A disciple is not above his master, nor a servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord."

Even thus, my brethren, we are sent to carry on the ministry of Galilee and Jerusalem. Through us the Son of Man still gladly gives Himself for the sons of men. Through us He comes again and again to seek and to save the lost. Through us He lightens human sorrows and temptations. Through us He bears the burdens of the heavy-laden and carries them to the Father. We are but continuing the work of long ago. For the Saviour of the world still saves the world through saviours; and saviours are they who can sacrifice themselves for others' sakes.

"Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you; as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." It is natural, when we meditate on the responsibility of our office, that we should be appalled at its weight and magnitude, and should cry out with the Apostle, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Who indeed are we, that we should bear God's revelations? Who are we, that we should dare to claim a part in the ministry of Christ? But again, when we turn our thoughts to the Divine sending, may not the words of weakness change on our lips into the words of

strength? We are sent by Christ Himself, and we should ever remember that. There is Someone at the back of us and our poor wisdom: there is Someone behind our service and fidelity. We are not working alone. We throw our toil into a great spirit realm where a mighty Power is waiting, who catches it up, and gives to it a shape, and makes of it a use we never could. Yes, it is Jesus Christ Himself who sends. How then can we despair, and how can we be afraid, knowing that all is perfected as well as planned by Jesus Christ? Shall we not rather exclaim with St. Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"? Shall we not rather say with St. Teresa, "Well do I know how little I can do, but close to Thee, if Thou dost not leave me, I can do everything"?

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not vain in the Lord." The faithful work will not be wasted, nor will the faithful worker be forgotten in the joy of his Lord. Let me remind you, in conclusion, of that beautiful passage in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, which tells how one Valiant-for-truth, who had bravely done on earth his Master's service, was called home to his reward. He was waiting, you remember, on the bank of the great river, and one day the summons came for him to cross. And when he understood it, he called his friends together and said: "I am going to my Father's; and though with

great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him who shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me, that I have fought His battles who now will be my Rewarder." When the day that he must go hence was come, Bunyan continues, many accompanied him to the river-side, into which as he went he said, "Death, where is thy sting?" And as he went down deeper, he said, "Grave, where is thy victory?" So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

XVI

THE PRACTICAL FORCE OF PRAYER

"One of His disciples said unto Him : Lord, teach us to pray."
—St. Luke xi. 1.

XVI

THE PRACTICAL FORCE OF PRAYER[1]

THE ideal of the great Society to which you, my sisters, belong is summed up in three words. They are: "Prayer, Purity, and Friendship." To achieve the great realities represented by these words, to attain these lofty ends, is, or at any rate ought to be, the aim of every member. To this each one is definitely committed. Each has her place in a vast league of comrades, inspired by a common purpose—the development of the higher life—and using for its furtherance the common instrument of prayer.

Now I wish this evening to speak to you briefly on the first of your three great words. I invite you to consider with me for a little while what is the practical force of prayer in everyday life. What can prayer do for us? What can it effect? What is its positive value and significance? For there cannot be a doubt that in some way or another prayer is power. The greatest men of history have been men of prayer. The most spiritual men, the prophets and saints and reformers, have been precisely those who were most

[1] Preached on the Annual Festival of the Girls' Friendly Society in the London Diocese.

instant and active in prayer. Our Lord Himself could not dispense with prayer. And all alike, knowing what prayer had actually wrought in their personal experience, bear witness to its wonder-working force for the ennoblement of life. They tell us that prayer is power, that prayer is victory. They tell us that, whatever else we leave undone, we must not leave this undone. They tell us that all is lost unless we pay attention to it. Our whole effectiveness in the last resort depends on our intercourse with God and the unseen world of God in prayer.

But in order to appreciate the practical force of prayer, let us be quite sure that we understand what prayer itself really is. For many, I think, conceive of it inadequately. They fancy that prayer is simply asking God for things, making requests for things, presenting petitions. And certainly it is true that such an asking and soliciting is an element in prayer; yet prayer itself is something wider and larger than that. Prayer is the upward springing of the soul of man to God; the outgoing of the whole nature with all its faculties towards God; the effort after communion, after closer intercourse, with God. It is to lift ourselves just as we are—with our hopes and fears and joys and cares and moods and passions—into the presence of our Father, and there to submit all to His loving Will and Purpose. Now, of course, you will see that prayer, in this sense of conscious movement towards God, will be infinitely varied in its phases and expressions. Sometimes it will take the form of

praise, sometimes of petition, sometimes of aspiration, sometimes of contrition. Sometimes it will voice itself in sentences and words; again it will be "the prayer of quiet," of which St. Teresa speaks, "when the soul understands that God is so near to her that she need not talk aloud to Him." But whatever be the form or mode or manner of expression, the object of prayer is invariably the same. It is not to instruct God, still less to prescribe Him a course of action, but to realise God as present and to bring every part of our being—our intellect, will, affections, everything we are—into harmony with Him. Thus we try, if we truly pray, to enter with our mind into the Mind of God, to connect our thought with His thought, to "think His thoughts after Him"; we try again to discipline and attune our will to God's—not to bend or turn or modify that perfect Will, but to make our own will one with it and embrace it as our choice; we try once more to turn towards God the current of our desires, so that what we long to get shall be that, and that only, which He longs to give. This is the ultimate object of prayer—to come into personal contact with God, to be changed more and more into likeness to God, to correspond with God. It is beautifully expressed in the prayer of St. Augustine: "Grant, O Lord, that I may desire Thee; and desiring Thee seek Thee; and seeking Thee find Thee; and finding Thee be satisfied with Thee for ever."

Now prayer of this sort is the most important thing in life. Without any exaggeration it is the

most critical thing we can do. Our work, our character, our value in the world, the entire result and outcome of our whole existence, depends on whether we are accustomed genuinely to pray or not. Is God brought into our life? Is God consulted about the details of our life? Do we seriously try to realise our Father's presence? Do we offer ourselves submissively to His influence and power? It is the question of questions, my sisters. The destiny of each of us is determined by our prayer. Goodness and badness, happiness and misery, triumph and defeat—all the great issues hang upon this single thread of prayer. Says Drummond: "Ten minutes spent in Christ's society every day, aye two minutes, if it be face to face and heart to heart, will make the whole life different."

Let me illustrate some of the ways in which prayer may be found a real, practical force in our everyday life. See, for example, how it helps us in our work. We have each one of us some piece of work to do, some piece of work which we would fain do well. We are anxious about it, may be; we do not feel sure of our capacity or industry; the work is on our mind and troubles us. Well, we take our toil and task and lay it before God in prayer. We try to understand how God would have it done, what is His will concerning it. We try to set aside all selfish aims and motives, and to conform ourselves in this entirely to His will. We ask Him to inspire us with the wish to work right, and the wisdom to work right, and the strength to work right, and then we leave the rest in the great

Father's hands, certain that the issue, whatever it may be, will be also right. Can such a practice fail to help us in our work? Can it fail to appease the fret and remove the worry and relieve the strain, to enable us to meet all difficulties with conquering energy? Why, it is no more merely we who work, but God that works through us, and all things now conspire in forwarding our aims. The obstacles become stepping-stones. The hindrances become helps. A host of unseen agencies are in motion on our behalf. The best result is sure.

Or consider the effects of prayer on suffering and sorrow. Men often talk unthinkingly of the uses of adversity, of the purifying power of pain and grief and sorrow. Yet surely sorrow in itself, the bare experience of pain, is scarcely profitable. Mere pain—unconsecrated, godless, prayerless pain—tends rather to be degrading. It hardens and embitters. It paralyses the energy. It fixes our thoughts on ourselves, and makes us worse because it makes us selfish. Yes, pain apart from God is simply horrible and evil. But let prayer be applied to suffering, and suddenly, as by magic, the whole case will become different. As we kneel in the presence of infinite Love, as we pour out our grief to our Father, as we feel God actually caring for us, actually sympathising with us, the sorrow quite changes its character. It is no more deadly poison, but a healing cup mixed and presented to us by a Good Physician. It is exactly what we need, just the thing which will most benefit us in the long run. Already, though dimly

still perhaps, we begin to perceive its purpose. And we can trust God. We can take our suffering bravely as the medicine of God. Nothing, near Him, can hurt us, so we can cease to be afraid.

"In the centre of the circle of the love of God I stand,
There can be no 'second causes,' all must come from His dear hand.
All is well; for is it not my Father who my life hath planned?
Though I cannot tell the reasons, I can trust, and so am blest.
God is Love and God is faithful, so in perfect peace I rest."

"The best place," said one who prayed much and suffered much—"the best place is wherever God puts us, and any other would be undesirable, all the worse because it would please our fancy and would be of our own choice."

Or yet again, see how prayer influences the moral character. One of the great demands, my sisters, which your Society makes upon you is that of purity—purity of word and thought and deed, the stainless virtue, the unspotted life. But where are you to find the strength with which to meet this high demand? I answer, only in prayer. It is only when you breathe, as it were, an atmosphere of prayer that temptation becomes powerless. Prayer is the single safeguard. To be in touch with God, to be filled with the sense of the nearness of God, to be gazing continually into the Face of God, to be intent on finding out and carrying out the Will of God—there is the

secret of the pure and lovely life. Nothing so helps and empowers you as to lift your soul to God and feel, amid all temptation, that He is present at your side. In that presence you see evil as it really is; you pass a righteous judgment on your own perversity. You recognise that you have wandered far astray, and resolve to walk henceforward in the appointed road. You repudiate your sin. All that is selfish and sordid and base, all that is wanton and vile, is rejected and cast away; and you determine to live more worthy of the Holiness that is so close to you. Truly great strength, great increase of moral energy, comes from these hours of prayer. The conviction that God is by you, watching over you, assisting you, acts as a force upon the character. Then the rebel will is subdued; then the conscience becomes tender; then the heart pours out its love; the whole personality answers to the drawing of the Father; the victory over sin and selfishness at last is won.

Or take just one other instance of the practical effects of prayer. It is, as you know, one of the aims of your Society to develope the grace of friendship. You are meant to be friends, real friends; not isolated individuals drifting by chance into a temporary connexion, but friends bound together by enduring ties, each linked to all the rest, each faithful and helpful and loyal to all the rest. Now there are many things which may help you towards realising this ideal, and I would not for a moment disregard or undervalue them; yet let me emphasise the truth

that the surest of all the means for achieving what you want—perhaps the only absolutely certain means —is simple prayer. Prayer is the seal of friendship. "Love and sympathy and tact and insight," it has truly been said, "are born of prayer." Nothing so unites us, nothing so draws us together, as prayer. For we cannot long withhold our hearts from those for whom we pray. If we pray, as Christ bids us pray, for those who are our enemies, we shall very soon cease to look on them as enemies. If we pray for our friends, we shall become yet closer friends. If we accustom ourselves each day to speak of our friends to God; if we spread before Him their needs and hopes and failings and possibilities; if we earnestly plead that His blessing may rest upon them; we shall certainly grow ourselves more interested in them, more considerate towards them, more one with them in sympathy than we ever were before. The ties of affection will be immensely strengthened. The frictions and jars, the little jealousies and differences which so often spoil our friendships, will gradually disappear. And we shall learn, through our communion with the Friend of all friends, to obey Him better when He says, "Love one another as I have loved you."

You see, then, in all these instances, that prayer is really power—a practical force which can shape our affairs and determine the course of our life. There are no limits to its efficacy. It is power in all directions—power of work and power of endurance

and power of character and power of friendship—power which enables us everywhere to carry on our battles, and overcome our difficulties, and grapple successfully with all that we come in contact with. No failure, indeed, is possible for the man who knows how to pray. He can lean on the Eternal. He can rely on Another's strength to supplement his weakness. Hard-pressed he appeals for succour, and instantly a Voice replies with comfort and encouragement:—

> "Tell him that his very longing is itself an answering cry,
> That his prayer 'Come, gracious Allah!' is My answer 'Here am I.'
> Every inmost aspiration is God's angel undefiled,
> And in every 'O my Father' slumbers deep a 'Here, my child.'"

But if all this be true, should we not take more pains to cultivate this power of prayer? We do not as a general rule grudge time and trouble in developing our gifts and aptitudes. The talented men, the talented women, those who have special skill in some particular direction, are ready and eager to exercise their talents and make the very most of them. How much more, then, should we be willing to exert ourselves in prayer! Here, as I have said, is the greatest power of all—the power of connecting our little fleeting life with the Eternal Life, of allying our human feebleness with the Omnipotence of God. Ought we not to pay more attention to this power? Would it not be well, for example, to take a little more time in

the morning to realise afresh God's actual Presence, and strengthen the soul with the sense of His companionship for the trials and temptations of the coming day? Would it not be well to take a little more time in the evening to renew the intercourse which sin perhaps has broken, and commit ourselves again, weak and wicked though we be, to His merciful protection? "Let prayer," it has quaintly been said, "be the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening." Yet even this should not be all: for prayer is no mere incident of dawn and sunset, but a continual spirit and attitude, something ever going on. "Think of God more often than you breathe," writes the most spiritual of the classic authors. Everything that happens to us ought to lift our thoughts to God. A sudden happiness or misfortune, a sickness or a festivity, a task, a fault, a slight success, a meeting with a friend—all these should remind us of the nearness of our Father. They should call us away to His presence, and serve as the occasion of a fresh dedication of ourselves and our lives to Him. And so we may learn by degrees the secret of perpetual prayer—that prayer "without ceasing" which the Apostle recommends; that prayer which begins in the morning and lasts on into the evening, hallowing all the labour and the pleasure of each day; that prayer which consists in constant mindfulness of God, in the constant attempt to see things from the point of view of God, in the constant desire and effort to perform the will of God; that prayer which St. Basil compares to the salt which

preserves and seasons everything in life, and which St. Francis of Sales with such simplicity defines as "doing everything in God's presence and for His service."

My sisters, you have at your disposal the greatest force in all the world, and to-night, with the deepest earnestness, I call on you to use it. Beyond those doors the battle of life is waiting for you; do not throw away your best and strongest weapon. Whatever else you do, learn first to pray. Let prayer be the watchword, not only of your Society, but of each individual member of it. Compel yourselves to pray. Ask, seek, knock; there is nothing that shall be denied you. The Kingdom of God itself shall be given to those who pray. "And this," says an ancient commentator, "is the Kingdom of God, when in all men God lives, God acts, God reigns, God is wholly present, according to the Apostle's word that 'God may be all and in us all.'"

XVII

ST. PAUL'S PLAN OF PROGRESS

"One thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal, unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."—PHIL. iii. 13, 14.

XVII

ST. PAUL'S PLAN OF PROGRESS

IF one were asked to choose out a conception which is at once the most widespread and the most characteristic of the present age, one would not be far wrong, perhaps, if one selected the idea of progress. The progress of civilisation is, or was till very recently, the watchword of the Western world. Men speak of it and write of it with extraordinary enthusiasm. They point exultantly to man's development in the past, to his marvellous evolution from the lower to the higher forms of organised existence, and they declare with a passionate confidence that this advancement must continue. Many who have lost belief in almost everything else still put their trust in progress. To some the ideal of the great "going on" is even a kind of religion. They can take as their own the sentence of a Russian novelist, "My faith is in civilisation, and I require no further creed."

And yet, my brethren, there will sometimes come a doubt whether these radiant hopes are really justified. Are we making indeed the great progress that we fancy? It is certainly true that, tested merely by material standards, our advance has been amazing

But man does not live by bread alone, and sooner or later we are bound to face the question whether the development of our spiritual qualities has kept pace with the increase of our bodily satisfactions. How is it with our spirit? Are we really better men, higher men, more divinely-minded men, than the men, say, of the sixteenth century, or of the sixth, or of the first? Are we nearer to the realisation of the supreme ideal? Are we steadily approaching the perfection of Christian character? Too often, I think, amid our noisy joy in the improvement of things around us, this great question is lost sight of; for, as Mrs. Browning writes:—

"We throw out acclamations of self-thanking, self-admiring
With, for every mile run faster, 'Oh, the wondrous, wondrous age!'
Little thinking if we work our souls as nobly as our iron,
Or if angels will commend us at the goal of pilgrimage."

And yet, after all, that is the main point. How is it with our spirit? Material advance is good. Advance in science, advance in mechanism, advance in the art of subduing the forces of nature to the service of man—we acknowledge it to be good. But unless there be something more to show than submarines and aeroplanes, something more even than comfortable homes and model schools and sanitary factories and well-lighted streets, we have insufficient reason for so priding ourselves on progress.

But it is not my intention this morning to discuss theoretical questions as to the measure of our progress. I wish rather to deal with a practical problem. How,

I would ask, may the spiritual development, the development of character which is the essence of all true progress, most readily be effected? By conforming to what laws, or by obeying what conditions, may earnest men and women rise to the summits of human life? I think that we may possibly get some light upon this subject if we study awhile a fragment of autobiography of an eminently progressive man—perhaps the most progressive man of the whole ancient world—the Apostle Paul. You have already heard the record. "One thing I do"—so it runs—"forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal, until the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Let us notice the three leading principles involved in St. Paul's plan of progress.

I

The first necessity for progress, according to the Apostle, seems to be purpose—a definite, spiritual purpose, a purpose directed to Christ. "One thing I do," says he—"I press on toward the goal." It is the maxim of a French genius that "great souls are not those which have fewer passions and more virtue than common ones, but those only which have greater aims." And something like that, I take it, was the opinion of St. Paul. Continually he emphasises the need of a noble aim. He knows how prone men are to dissipate their powers, to fritter away their energy

in frivolous, futile activities, and both in himself and others he seeks to counteract the tendency. Get an object in life, he cries. Have a purpose. Have an ideal. Find out what it is that is best in all the world, and bend your whole living to that. Aim, aim, aim at one great thing.

Now, is not this a warning which we may all of us take to heart? "The great misfortune of my life," said Robert Burns, "was to want an aim." And it is the great misfortune of hundreds of thousands of lives. There is nothing, perhaps, in modern society which so impresses an observer as its apparent aimlessness. In every class alike there seems to be an absence of clear intention, a want of a great determining Christian ideal, a lack of the sense of consecration to a purpose. Look around on the people of London alone, and what do you see? At the top of the social scale you find an aristocracy of birth and wealth, whirling about in a breathless rush of incessant sociabilities; fascinated, yet not a little wearied, with the excitement of the game; living for half the year at furious pressure, and only resting during the other half to recruit its shattered nerves for the pleasures and tasks to come. And what is the inner meaning of this feverish turmoil of life? Nobody knows. What is its ultimate purpose? No one can say. You go a little way down the social scale and you come to the middle class. The people of this stratum are energetic, busy people. The men spend most of the day in their offices in the City; the women are much engaged with household occupations,

with motoring and visiting, with bridge-parties and bazaars. The life is on the whole a virtuous life, often a useful life; perhaps, all things considered, the best type of London life. And yet is it not frequently an unpremeditated life? What are these people tending to? Nobody knows. What is the goal of their endeavour and their pleasure? No one can say. What is the end, the final object of it all? No one can tell. And if you go still lower to the so-called working-class class, you will find the same thing true. Life is here shut up in within the narrowest horizons. Men spin out their existence in a dull routine of work, broken at intervals by Sundays and Bank Holidays—a slow routine, monotonous as the ticking of a clock, unillumined by any purpose, uninspired by any ideal. You ask these plodding workers, What is it all about? What are you working for beyond the bare supply of your material necessities? But nobody knows. Does life mean really more than a factory and a football match, a shop and a Sunday excursion, two long grey months of labour and one uproarious pleasure-day on Hampstead Heath? No one can tell.

What a contrast there is between these little, restless, aimless people and the great Apostle Paul! Here is a man who starts right away with an object in life—something to strive for, something to achieve, something worth achieving. He has a goal to which his whole existence tends. And that goal—it is Jesus Christ. His ruling passion is to get nearer to Jesus

Christ, to be more like Jesus Christ, to grow up into Jesus Christ, to do the work of Jesus Christ. That is his dominant purpose. He aims. He concentrates. He gives his life a centre. He strives to bring everything—all his faculties and powers, all his experiences and activities—into relation with that centre. He is desperately in earnest. He has an ideal which he is perfectly clear about, splendidly keen about, and he follows it up. "One thing," he cries—"one thing I do . . . I press on toward the goal, unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

II

The second necessity for progress, according to the Apostle, is independence of the past. "Forgetting the things which are behind," he says, "and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on." He dismisses the past, you see. He sets it aside, forgets it. His thoughts are all of the future. The rule for St. Paul, for this most progressive of men, is not the rule of that which was, nor even the rule of that which is, but the rule of that which is to be.

But is this right? Is this true? Surely we are not intended simply to ignore the past. We oftentimes revert to the things which are behind, and we cannot but believe that we are justified in doing so. It is good to recall the old scenes, the old struggles,

the old battles, the old triumphs. We like to remember both the bright days and the dark days; to remember how often when our night was at its blackest and all our hopes seemed dead, the morning came gradually stealing over the sky, and the song of the birds awoke, and the cheerfulness and energy of life began once more. For the better part of our wisdom, too, we are indebted to the past. How much have we learnt from it! What teaching have we found in the world's history, in our nation's history, in our own history! Where should we all be now without those lessons? "The past is myself . . ." cries Robert Louis Stevenson. "In the past is my present fate; and in the past also is my real life." Truly it was no shallow thinker who said, "Poor is the man who has no yesterday."

But it is not against the discriminating use of the past that the Apostle would protest. It is only against the abuse of it. He warns us to be on our guard against the thraldom of the past, against its deadening influence. He urges us not to be hampered by it, not to be restricted by it, not to be bound and tied down and fettered by it. For the sake of present life and present action, it is needful again and again to forget the things which are behind. A modern philosopher, Nietzsche, has laid stress upon this idea. "Forgetfulness," he writes, "is a property of all action. . . . Life in any true sense is absolutely impossible without forgetfulness." And Maeterlinck also has a similar message. "Let us listen only to

the experience that urges us on," he says; "it is always higher than that which throws or keeps us back. Let us reject all the counsels of the past that do not turn us towards the future."

Some Christians, I think, are hindered in the spiritual life by excessive absorption in the historic past. They are paralysed by antiquity. The old things hold them with a fearful fascination. They cannot bring themselves to abandon the old ideas, the old establishments, the venerable formulas, the customs of their fathers. They dare not venture out of the trodden ways or commit themselves to anything which is not sanctioned by a precedent. Thus their powers of soul and mind and will are stifled by conservatism. How well would it be if such would take example from St. Paul! In spite of his natural love of the past, in spite of his respect and reverence for the past, St. Paul, when occasion demands, can leave the past behind. He relentlessly leaves it behind. Tarsus, with its Greek culture and its famous Stoic lecture-rooms, is left behind. Jerusalem, with the scribal school where he once learned the law from Gamaliel, is left behind. Pharisaism, with its forms and regulations and observances, is left behind. Everything that constrains, everything that trammels, everything that blocks and stops the sweep of the spirit and the flow of life—it is utterly left behind. Paul presses on independent of the past. Paul presses on to the new hope and the better future.

There are others, again, who are hindered in the spiritual life by excessive absorption in their own individual past. Like Bunyan's Christian at the beginning of his pilgrimage, they are weighed down under a burden—the burden of past sins, of past follies, of past falls, of miserable failures and disappointments and mistakes. That burden crushes them. It takes all the spring out of life. It chills the noble ardours, checks the generous impulses, extinguishes enthusiasm. To such, again, there comes the salutary warning—Forget. It is better to forget. We cannot more effectually redeem a wasted past than by raising ourselves out of it, by healing its wounds, by replacing its losses, by repairing so far as we may its broken moulds. Then let the weakness and the wickedness of our yesterdays be dismissed. "Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before," let us "press on toward the goal, unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

"Let us forget the things that vexed and tried us,
The worrying things that caused our souls to fret;
The hopes that, cherished long, were still denied us
Let us forget.

"Let us forget the little slights that pained us,
The greater wrongs that rankle sometimes yet;
The pride with which some lofty one disdained us
Let us forget. . . .

"But blessings manifold, past all deserving,
Kind words and helpful deeds, a countless throng,
The fault o'ercome, the rectitude unswerving
Let us remember long."

III

Then, lastly, there is yet a third necessity for progress. And this, according to St. Paul, is effort—ceaseless effort, calculated effort. He pictures the runner, the athlete, with body bent forward on the course and every limb and organ strained in exercise. "I press on toward the goal." "Not laxity," it has been said, "but tension is what the Divine Trainer demands in the spiritual muscle of those whom He sends into the arena."

In worldy affairs, my brethren, we are ready enough to recognise the necessity of effort. We have learnt —have we not?—in the rough school of experience that nothing on earth is to be had for nothing. There are no gains without pains. "The law of nature is," writes Ruskin, "that a certain quantity of work is necessary to produce a certain quantity of good, of any kind whatever. If you want knowledge, you must toil for it; if food, you must toil for it; and if pleasure, you must toil for it." "Nature," says Goethe, "knows no pause, and attaches a curse upon all inaction." Yes, it is in effort and toil, when the bow of a man's energy is bent to the very utmost, when his faculties are working at full speed under high pressure, that the great deeds are done and the great personalities are generated. It is always in effort. The lazy man, the timid man, the stupid man, the over-civilised man who has lost the strong, masterful, energetic virtues, may bury himself in

pillows in some comfortable corner, heedless of glory and the struggle that is calling him, cheered by no victory, grieved by no defeat. But the true man girds himself up and works. "He can toil terribly," said Cecil of Sir Walter Raleigh. "He laboured," writes Goethe's biographer, "with the passionate patience of genius." "Having decided what was to be done," observes Emerson of Napoleon, "he did that with might and main. He put out all his strength. He risked everything and spared nothing—neither ammunition, nor money, nor troops, nor generals, nor himself."

And the same holds good in spiritual affairs. Here also, whether we will or no, we are subjected to the law of effort. We must do or we shall die. We must press on or we perish. There is no alternative. Often, no doubt, we think with fond regret of our pleasant, vanished Edens. Often our fancy longingly anticipates the peace of some future millennium. Often we crave for a cessation of the struggle, for rest from the sting and challenge, for abatement, at least, of this vehemence of exertion. But it may not be. We cannot evade the great condition of our life or disclaim our responsibility. The race must needs be run. The path is clear before us, and we are cowards, unfaithful to ourselves and to our future, if we do not pursue it the end.

Listen, then, just once more to the manly voice of Paul. "I press on," he cries. I struggle forward. I

push ahead. I am the runner. I am the athlete. I am the fighter. I am the pioneer. I make effort and press on. Through obstacles and difficulties, through dangers and disappointments, through temptations and persecutions, through the troubles and trials of life, through the shadows and sorrows of death—still on, for ever and for ever on. "One thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal, unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

In conclusion, my brethren, let me remind you for an instant of what I said at the beginning. The progress of civilisation, of which we boast so much to-day, depends on nothing else than our own spiritual development, on the advancement which we make in the qualities and graces of the genuinely Christian character. And this advance in turn—this spiritual advance—on what does that depend? Not on the blind operation of the natural laws of heredity; not on the calculated action of a society or a government. It depends, after God, on ourselves—on our own will, our own zeal, our own spiritual activity. Should we not be wise, then, if we endeavoured to put into practice those grand principles of progress that are laid down by St. Paul? By purpose, by self-emancipation from the bondage of the past, by honest effort, even we may run like him our earthly course, like him attain at length the wished-for goal. Do you

remember that touching passage in Bunyan's immortal allegory which tells how two pilgrims, who had followed the Apostle's plan, reached the end of their long journey, and were welcomed after their labours into the City of the King? "Now I saw in my dream," writes Bunyan, "that these two men went in at the gate; and lo! as they entered, they were transfigured; and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There were also that met them with harps and crowns, and gave them to them—the harps to praise withal, and the crowns in token of honour. Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the City rang again for joy, and it was said unto them 'Enter ye into the joy of your Lord.'"

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